UHF

ULTRA HIGH FIDELITY

MAGAZINE

No. 76

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LOUDSPEAKERS: Does the Totem Mani-2 still rate as one of the world's truly great speakers? We also look at an economy speaker from an old friend, Castle. And an affordable speaker with a Heil tweeter.

THE COMPUTER AS MUSIC SOURCE: We get out hands on the newest Squeezebox, and find that a computer can bury many a "high end" CD player

PLUS: Paul Bergman on speaker impedance, and how to measure the impedance of your own speaker





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Issue No. 76



*Cover story:*A new look at the contemporary version of the Totem Mani-2, which we once called one of the world's finest speakers. In the background: a cloudscape of the imagination.

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EDITORIAL

The all-digital issue

Until this issue, Albert was taking the widely-admired product photos appearing in *UHF* with a Nikon camera on Kodak Portra 160 film. As of this issue all his photos are digital. *UHF* has acquired a Sony R1 digital camera.

Yes, I know, that means we have in a sense dumped analog (film) for digital, but in fact that ship sailed a long time ago. The magazine has been printed digitally for something like a decade, which means that our nice "analog" film negatives got digitized anyway before placement in our all-digital pages. The difference: digitization is now taking place right in the camera instead of a desktop digitizer.

Albert is delighted with the results. I think you will be too.

All color, except…

Issue No. 75 was *UHF's* very first all-color issue, and both our readers and our advertisers took note. Oh, except for the eight-page insert in the centre of the magazine, the one for our Audiophile Store. That remained black and white, and on cheaper paper besides. It has been that way for many years, with the economy paper intended to hold costs down.

But *was* it holding costs down, or is labor even more expensive than premium paper grades? After the last issue went to press we asked our printer rep: if we dumped the insert and just added eight more *color* pages, would it be more expensive? Or cheaper? We got the answer the next day: it would be cheaper!

That's why the insert is gone. We scrambled to find color pictures of all the accessories found in our store, and the store catalog is now on full color pages. So now we really are all-color, except…

Except that audio manufacturers haven't got the word about color. Check out the stack of three headphone amplifiers on page 38. Can you believe that's a color picture? There isn't a hint of a tint in any of them. Of course when you plug one in you'll probably see a tiny, barely visible blue diode glowing its little non monochromatic note. Whoopee!

Even Apple, that champion of high style in consumer electronics, knows only two colors, one of which is white and the other of which is not. Good thing the iPod (on page 45) has a color screen. As for the tragically misnamed iPod Hi-Fi on page 78…well, I rest my case.

And speaking of the iPod…

We've already mentioned that a 60 Gb iPod, the largest one available, is part of our reference arsenal. We've also ment

ABOUT THIS FREE EDITION

UHF lives in great part from the sale of the full edition of the magazine. But we also offer this free edition. The articles are not complete, as you'll see, but many are, and you'll find lots to read. Of course you can order either the printed edition or the full electronic edition, and get every word.

We figure you wouldn't settle for less, and neither will we.



DOG-EARED MAGAZINES? PHOOEY!



How's this for ironic! You can pay a lot for a magazine, or you can get it cheaper, and it's the expensive copy that's likely to be tattered, torn, and... yes, dog-eared.

We mean the newsstand copy. Where do copies sit around unprotected? At the newsstand. Where do other people leaf through them before you arrive, with remains of lunch on their fingers? At the newsstand. Where do they stick on little labels you can't even peel off? Well...

Surprise! At a lot of newsstands, they do exactly that! Our subscribers, on the other hand, get pristine copies, protected in plastic, with the label on the plastic, not the cover.

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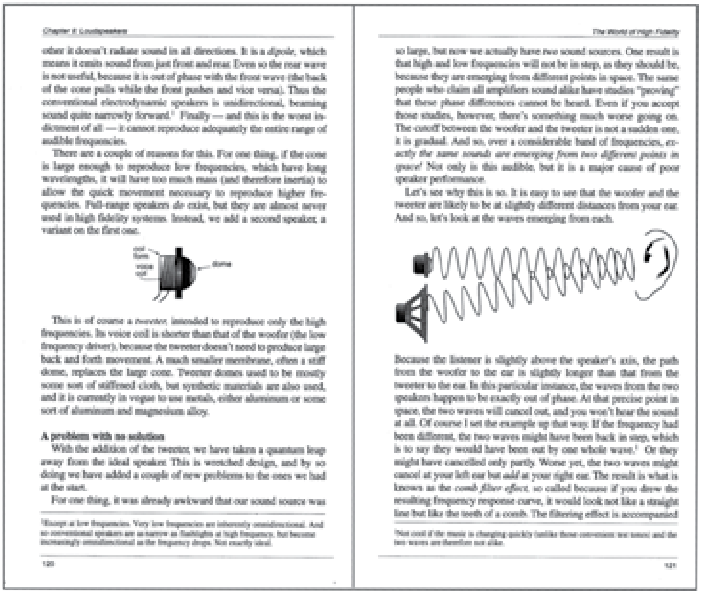
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The books that explain...



other it doesn't radiate sound in all directions. It is a *dipole*, which means it emits sound from just front and rear. Even so the rear wave is not useful, because it is out of phase with the front wave (the back of the cone pulls while the front pushes and vice versa). Thus the conventional electrodynamic speakers is unidirectional, beaming sound quite narrowly forward.[1] Finally — and this is the worst indictment of all — it cannot reproduce adequately the entire range of audible frequencies.

There are a couple of reasons for this. For one thing, if the cone is large enough to reproduce low frequencies, which have long wavelengths, it will have too much mass (and therefore inertia) to allow the quick movement necessary to reproduce higher frequencies. Full-range speakers *do* exist, but they are almost never used in high fidelity systems. Instead, we add a second speaker, a variant on the first one.

This is of course a *tweeter*, intended to reproduce only the high frequencies. Its voice coil is shorter than that of the woofer (the low frequency driver), because the tweeter doesn't need to produce large back and forth movement. A much smaller membrane, often a stiff dome, replaces the large cone. Tweeter domes used to be mostly some sort of stiffened cloth, but synthetic materials are also used, and it is currently in vogue to use metals, either aluminum or some sort of aluminum and magnesium alloy.

A problem with no solution

With the addition of the tweeter, we have taken a quantum leap away from the ideal speaker. This is wretched design, and by so doing we have added a couple of new problems to the ones we had at the start.

For one thing, it was already awkward that our sound source was

[1]Except at low frequencies. Very low frequencies are inherently omnidirectional. And so conventional speakers are as narrow as flashlights at high frequency, but become increasingly omnidirectional as the frequency drops. Not exactly ideal.

so large, but now we actually have *two* sound sources. One result is that high and low frequencies will not be in step, as they should be, because they are emerging from different points in space. The same people who claim all amplifiers sound alike have studies "proving" that these phase differences cannot be heard. Even if you accept those studies, however, there's something much worse going on. The cutoff between the woofer and the tweeter is not a sudden one, it is gradual. And so, over a considerable band of frequencies, *exactly the same sounds are emerging from two different points in space!* Not only is this audible, but it is a major cause of poor speaker performance.

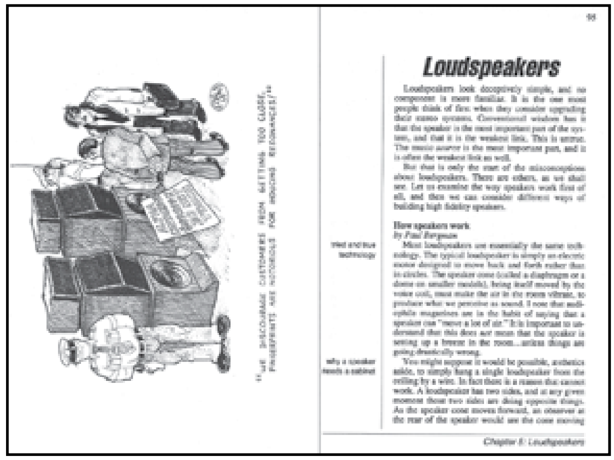
Let's see why this is so. It is easy to see that the woofer and the tweeter are likely to be at slightly different distances from your ear. And so, let's look at the waves emerging from each.

Because the listener is slightly above the speaker's axis, the path from the woofer to the ear is slightly longer than that from the tweeter to the ear. In this particular instance, the waves from the two speakers happen to be exactly out of phase. At that precise point in space, the two waves will cancel out, and you won't hear the sound at all. Of course I set the example up that way. If the frequency had been different, the two waves might have been back in step, which is to say they would have been out by one whole wave.[1] Or they might have cancelled only partly. Worse yet, the two waves might cancel at your left ear but *add* at your right ear. The result is what is known as the *comb filter effect*, so called because if you drew the resulting frequency response curve, it would look not like a straight line but like the teeth of a comb. The filtering effect is accompanied

[1]Not cool if the music is changing quickly (unlike those convenient test tones) and the two waves are therefore not alike.

The World of High Fidelity

This long-running best seller includes these topics: The basics of amplifiers, preamplifiers, CD players, turntables and loudspeakers. How they work, how to choose, what to expect. The history of hi-fi. How to compare equipment that's not in the same store. What accessories work, and which ones are scams. How to tell a good connector from a rotten one. How to set up a home theatre system that will also play music (hint: don't do any of the things the other magazines advise). How to plan for your dream system even if your accountant says you can't afford it. A precious volume with 224 pages of essential information for the beginning or advanced audiophile!



Loudspeakers

Loudspeakers look deceptively simple, and no component is more familiar. It is the one most people think of first when they consider upgrading their stereo systems. Conventional wisdom has it that the speaker is the most important part of the system, and that it is the weakest link. This is untrue. The music *source* is the most important part, and it is often the weakest link as well.

But that is only the start of the misconceptions about loudspeakers. There are others, as we shall see. Let us examine the way speakers work first of all, and then we can consider different ways of building high fidelity speakers.

How speakers work
by Paul Bergman

Tried and true technology

Most loudspeakers are essentially the same technology. The typical loudspeaker is simply an electric motor designed to move back and forth rather than in circles. The speaker cone (called a diaphragm or a dome on smaller models), being itself moved by the voice coil, must make the air in the room vibrate, to produce what we perceive as sound. I note that audiophile magazines are in the habit of saying that a speaker can "move a lot of air." It is important to understand that this does *not* mean that the speaker is setting up a breeze in the room...unless things are going drastically wrong.

why a speaker needs a cabinet

You might suppose it would be possible, aesthetics aside, to simply hang a single loudspeaker from the ceiling by a wire. In fact there is a reason that cannot work. A loudspeaker has two sides, and at any given moment those two sides are doing opposite things. As the speaker cone moves forward, an observer at the rear of the speaker would see the cone moving

The UHF Guide to Ultra High Fidelity

This is our original book, which has been read by thousands of audiophiles, both beginners and advanced. It's still relevant to much of what you want to accomplish.

It's a practical manual for the discovery and exploration of high fidelity, which will make reading other books easier. Includes in-depth coverage of how the hardware works, including tubes, "alternative" loudspeakers, subwoofers, crossover networks, biamplification. It explains why, not just how. It has full instructions for aligning a tone arm, and a gauge is included. A complete audio lexicon makes this book indispensable. And it costs as little as $9.95 in the US and Canada (see the coupon).

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FEEDBACK

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I'd like to thank you for publishing the component-by-component description and especially the photo of the Omega system on the *UHF* Web site. I have long been curious to see a photo of any of your three systems, but since they are working tools I had assumed that they were, shall we say, less than presentable. Given all the equipment and accessories you review, I had a mental image of ankle-deep piles of mismatched interconnects and cables strewn about the room.

It's also reassuring to see that you have the same aggravating room problems as your readers (what appears to be a doorway just left of the left speaker, the turntable sitting askew on its platform to allow for access, etc).

The combination of the Omega system photo and the similarly appreciated *UHF* No. 75 *State of the Art* article has given me a sort of speaker positioning awakening. I had always understood and agreed with your advocacy of placing the speakers on either side of a room corner (if possible), but I had not conceived of being asymmetrical within that placement (i.e. I had always assumed that the corner should be exactly midway between the two speakers). Unless my eyes are deceiving me, the Omega system speakers are not centred about the corner, but are shifted rather significantly to the left. True?

Given such an asymmetrical corner placement, should each speaker nevertheless be about the same distance out from the wall (as appears in the Omega system), or can that also be different?

Given a decent hi-end system and acoustics, and a stereo image that appears to originate midway between the speakers from the "sweet spot", how far off axis should one be able to sit and still hear that image as being centered rather than increasingly originating from the nearest speaker? All the way out until a speaker is directly in front of you? Beyond even that?

Given the size of standard equipment racks and the W-8, it looks as though the inside edges of the Omega Reference 3a's are about 2 m apart, but only about 30 cm out from the wall (that seems really close). Given that the Omega system is in a "large room" just how far from the speakers is your listening position? I would imagine relatively close.

My Totem Mani-2's are centered about the narrow wall of a long, narrow room (8.4 m x 3.5 m) having at best mediocre acoustics. They are placed way into the room, about 1.25 m from the back of the speakers to the wall. I have always assumed they needed that much room for their prodigious depth. In your recollection from the review you performed (quite a few years ago now), is that distance too great? (For reference, my speakers are about 1.8 m apart centre-centre, and I sit 2.8 m away from them — and with experimentation I think that the 2.8 m is about 0.6 m too far away.)

I had rejected an Omega-like speaker placement when I first bought my house due to the constraints of the room, but if the Totems can be significantly closer to the wall (particularly in a corner-centered placement), then it's worth a try experimenting with such a placement to see if I can improve the width of my currently very narrow sweet spot. By necessity I'll almost be in the near-field (another great *UHF* article), but that might help negate the poor room acoustics.

Jeff Tennant
BURLINGTON, ON

❏ *Jeff, for anyone who missed it, we should mention that the photos of our Omega system appeared on line in our ephemeral Virtual Room, which opened the week before the Montreal show and remained open through mid-April. It has since closed, but we expect to bring back new incarnations of it.*

We should add that the Omega system was particularly easy to photograph, but the Alpha system is a lot closer to the way you imagine our systems to be.

You are right that the speakers have been placed asymmetrically in the room, but then the walls on either side are not quite identical. You noted that there is a doorway to the left, but there is also a doorway on the right... actually a large archway to an even larger room. These are not necessarily bad things. An open doorway does not reflect sound, and thus it can be thought of as a broadband absorber. The speakers are indeed quite close to the rear walls, about 50 cm out, a distance that was determined by ear. Speakers we review are first listened to at the same distance, then adjusted by ear as well. The speakers are actually quite far apart, about 4.5 metres, and we listen, typically, from about 4 metres back.

The Signature version of the Mani-2 is reviewed in this issue, and we found that a distance of about 65 cm from the rear wall was about right, though that will vary from room to room. By the way, how far off you can sit off-axis and still hear a stereo image depends on speaker placement, acoustics, and especially the speakers themselves. With our Reference 3a speakers you can get away with being well off-axis. The same would be true of well-placed Totem Mani-2's.

Of all the many enjoyable things on your Web site, the tour of the Virtual Room was the best. I would love to see the same treatment to the other two rooms you maintain.

Thanks for all the good advice.

Jay Valancy
IRVINE, CA

First, let me say we appreciate the opportunity to have *UHF Magazine* review our speakers again after so much time. This new range of Energy speakers is in our opinion one of the best we have ever made and still continues to provide Canadian audiophiles with the best sound available for the money. We were therefore surprised to read that your team was unimpressed with the new Reference Connoisseur RC-70 speakers. This is one of our most popular speakers and has, to date, received terrific reviews

highlighting their tremendous imaging, dynamics and musicality.

Tom Norton, of *Stereophile* and *Ultimate AV* fame, had a totally different opinion of the RC-70 than your team. In his review Mr. Norton is quoted as saying, "the RC-70 had superb overall tonal balance" and that the "top end of the RC-70 is as open, airy and as detailed as you could wish for." Mr. Norton's comments regarding soundstage reproduction and midrange accuracy are also different from what you found. He said, "the RC-70's sounded neither 'in your face' forward nor recessed, and produced a detailed, well-focused soundstage… Voices were…beautifully served by the RC-70, with soaring female voices and male vocals that were rich and full bodied."

We are not sure if your opinions were biased due to your experience and appreciation of the old Reference Connoisseur model, or if you were looking for something else from these speakers. Your comparison of the original Reference Connoisseur to today's RC-70 is like comparing a 20-year-old muscle car with today's muscle car. They are very different in every sense, and making … a direct comparis… apples and orang… be good or exceller… very differently, a… into consideration.

Today's Refer… product had more c… to meet. Twenty y… about the sound. E… low distortion and p… less of a concern. To… used in a number of different configurations, from state of the art two channel systems to high-powered multichannel systems. The Reference Connoisseur Series must have the efficiency to be driven with modest-powered amplifiers, plus must have the dynamic range and power handling to handle the demands of movie soundtracks. A three-year development program was necessary to redesign every component in order to meet these standards. The new tweeter, midrange and woofers for the Reference Connoisseur Series are ground-breaking in their ability to perform to the highest musical standards, while providing ultra low distortion with high power handling.

All of us here feel the new RC-70 surpasses the performance parameters that were established by the original Reference Connoisseur. The RC-70 still has the captivating, immersive sound of the original, but has improvements in almost every area.

In your review you mention that the frequency response curve "is amazingly flat, one of the best we have ever measured." Then you suggest that comes at a cost: phase accuracy. Flat frequency response of the speaker system is made up of both magnitude and phase relationships of the individual drivers. Since you mention the RC-70 has flat frequency response, it would suggest that the phase relationship between the individual drivers is also correct.

Also, another point is the placement of the microphone in trying to recreate the square wave that you were measuring. In a two-way speaker, the microphone distance can be at a shorter distance and still deliver a somewhat meaningful measurement. With a multi-source speaker system like the RC-… …ence of room boundaries when the microphone is placed at greater distances from the speaker.

We are still not certain why you were not able to get good results from the RC-70, even though the response curve suggests the speaker should be excellent. Maybe the room you placed the speaker in was too small for such a full range speaker system? We do know that the RC-70 is definitely suited to larger rooms than the previous Reference Connoisseur model, as it has more extended response and output.

As you can tell, we are very disappointed by the tone of your review and by some of the comments, which we feel, are unfounded. We think the Energy brand and its loyal customer base deserved better.

Scott Goodman
Energy Speakers Brand Manager
SCARBOROUGH, ON

Interactive features

This free issue works just like the full (paid) electronic version of the magazine. Click on a heading in the table of contents, and you'll be whisked right to the article itself. Same thing with the names of advertisers on page 79. And if you click on most ads in this issue, if you're connected to the Internet you'll find yourself on the company's Web site.

Kudos and, better, bravo for a singular and superlative publication. I quite eagerly digested my very first issue ever of *UHF* about a week ago. I am still in a very pleasant state of shock!

Having quite regularly sampled both *The Absolute Sound* and *Stereophile* for about four decades, my mind set was entirely unprepared for *UHF's* unique raison d'être. Your guiding ethos, ethics and modus operandi are so simple in their fundamental elegance. To allude to Carly Simon's lyrics celebrating the now mythic procreative capacity of 007 is simply incorrect. Not only "Nobody Does it Better" — double negative intended — but no other publication *does it!*

Bob Reinach
POULSBO, WA

…spelling mistake on the …o. 75… "redicovery." …r subscribers are prob-… educated than most, …obably be getting a … …agazine though.

Jeff Malloch
ELORA, ON

…er thinks of running spellcheck on a cover. Too obvious, right?

I read the comment about the "open source" turntable in *UHF* No. 74. Your writer said that this was not the way hi-fi equipment is designed.

Yet one of the top billed turntables around, the Teres , was designed just this way. Interested people got together on a newsgroup and deliberated, and this led to a small run of parts and then a commercial endeavor, and some pretty over-the-top variations, not to mention the Redpoint brand. You can check out the process here: http://www.teresaudio.com/project/index.html.

Dominic
MONTRÉAL, QC

Free Advice

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First, let me say that I bought both of your books on high fidelity and loved them. I also received a copy of your magazine and have subscribed for the next two years. I also ordered six of the most current back issues.

I got back into hi-fi about two years ago after 15 or so years and find myself wondering why I ever got out. My current two channel system consists of the following: Wadia 861 standard CD player, CAT JL-2 tube amplifier, Martin Logan Odyssey speakers, and Audio Research PH3 phono preamp.

I have a small collection of vinyl recordings that have not been played in years. I have had the itch to incorporate analog into my system. My question to you is which turntable you would suggest to match the Audio Research preamp? I don't want to spend much more than $3500 in total for the turntable and cartridge.

I have heard good things about both Nottingham's Spacedeck and turntables from Pro-Ject. I purchased the Audio Research PH3 used and plan to upgrade in a year or so to the CAT SL1 preamp with phono input. Any comments about this particular preamp? I have been using an old Thorens turntable that I had lying around, but I have not been very happy with its performance. I didn't know if I should try upgrading the cartridge first or just move on right away.

Carl Waldbillig
WEST CHESTER, OH

We'd move on right away, Carl. The best argument in favor of used Thorens turntables is that people all but give them away. They were somewhat better than average, and better than the Duals, whose reputation remains a mystery to us, but their tone arms were wretched, and we wouldn't overspend on a cartridge for a Thorens arm. Incidentally, they are unrelated to the modern Thorens tables, which seem better designed, though we still have problems with the arms.

We've also heard good things about the Nottingham, with which we have however no experience. We have listened to several Pro-Ject turntables, and there may be a good choice to be made from its lineup, probably in the RPM series. Note that Pro-Ject offers electronic speed control as an extra-cost accessory. In our experience, that sort of upgrade affects more than just correct speed and is worth including.

There are several cartridge brands we like, including Benz Micro and Clearaudio, and we hear the newest Dynavectors are worth a detour. You should get a moving coil pickup, or failing that a moving magnet cartridge with very low inductance, and certainly a line contact stylus. Your budget won't let you buy the very top, but careful shopping should score you a very good experience. There are of course other possible brands of turntables, including Rega and Clearaudio, to name but two.

You may want to choose a model that is available with local service, because a top turntable that isn't aligned properly is not going to give you what you pay for. And little things are going to count, because you have a high resolution system. We can presume that adding the SL1 preamplifier will let you hear with even greater clarity anything that may be wrong with the source. On the positive side, your system's resolution will make you very glad you're listening to vinyl again.

I have a question concerning acoustics, or more precisely treating my listening room for low frequencies. I have a very good sound system that reproduces highs and the midrange marvellously well. The low frequencies have good impact, but there's a sort of boominess around 80 to 100 Hz (hard to be sure), suggesting a resonance.

I wonder whether you know of some way — for example some sort of panel — that could reduce this phenomenon, or better yet eliminate it. I have already built panels two inches thick of different shapes, using a Masonite sheet on which I had glued with liquid tar a very heavy black paper, all nailed into a frame made from two-inch wood. I had screwed the panels to the ceiling in my former home in Repentigny and the results had been very good. But now I live in the Gaspé. What do you think?

Marien Desrosiers
ST-JEAN DE CHERBOURG, QC

Marien, if your home-built panels gave you good results it is certainly because the acoustical problems you then had were in a different part of the frequency band. From what you say your new room has a problem in the extreme lows. Here the solution is more complicated.

Why more complicated? It's because sounds in the range of 80 to 100 Hz have a very long wavelength (more than 3 metres for 100 Hz!). The long wavelength will pass easily through a thin panel and bounce off whatever is on the other side. A panel that can deal with such frequencies needs to be…thicker. In the case of our Alpha room, the home of our original reference system, behind one wall is a bass trap nearly a metre deep! A radical solution to be sure.

It's possible to build a freestanding bass trap with well-chosen dimensions (it might be 1 m by 75 cm by 60 cm, for instance, with no dimension that is a multiple of another dimension), built from materials that are relatively nonresonant put permeable to sound. You would fill it with mineral wool, so that air vibrating within the cavity would rub against the fibres and be dissipated as heat.

However certain articles of furniture can also help absorb bass, at least to a point. A well upholstered sofa can help, as can a bookcase full of books. Finally, changes in speaker placements can have a great influence on what you hear. Since moving speakers is free, that is where we would start.

My equipment consists of a Roksan Radius 5 turntable, a Rega Fono, a Rega

Planet 2000, Reference 3a MM de Capo-i speakers, a Moon I-3 amp, an Inouye line filter, Atlas Navigator cables, GutWire power cables, and Puresonic Competition flat speaker cables.

My question is what to upgrade now?I am thinking of trading up to a Moon I-5. Is there a big enough difference between these two integrated amps? The sound of this system is very nice at low to moderate volume, but loses something above a certain volume. I don't listen at extreme levels but would like to get a little more volume before the sound starts to harden up.

Pete Doan
RIDING MOUNTAIN, MB

We found pretty much the same thing you did when we reviewed the Moon I-3 in *UHF* No. 71, Pete. We liked it a lot, but when we raised the volume we could tell we were listening to a small amplifier. It will perfectly suit a lot of music lovers, but you'll be happier with the I-5. Ironically the I-5 is less powerful than the I-3, but current is as important as power, and subjectively the I-5 appears to have four times the power.

By the way, there is now an updated version, the Moon I-5.3.

I have just come across your magazine and am impressed. I don't believe the local bookstores here carry it.

I have four Linn LK's Aktiv on 5140 and 5120 speakers, primarily for home theatre. Would you recommend upgrading these amps to something else in the Linn line, keeping the Aktiv speakers, or blowing out the whole thing, at no small cost?

Jay Avril
CLEARWATER, FL

No small cost indeed, Jay, and a move to be undertaken only if you have reason to believe that you made a mistake going with this Linn system in the first place. And we don't think you did. We like the idea of biamplifying, and although this is not a Linn invention it was Linn that made it so simple.

The bad news is that the company in January discontinued not only the whole LK line, but also announced it was dropping the Aktiv system entirely. We don't approve, but the marbles belong to Ivor, not to us.

If you'll be staying with Linn, you'll need to move while LK products remain in stock. Linn does make a chassis that will power your crossover modules so that you can use them with an amplifier that does not have a slot for them. You may then want to look at an amplifier upgrade. That can be one of Linn's newer amps, though of course at that point you can choose your manufacturer and still remain active…er, Aktiv.

I'm in search of a quality bookshelf speaker and have narrowed my short list to the Reference 3a De Capo-i's. My room dimensions are 12' X 10'. My system is centred on the longest wall, so I don't have much choice but to place my speakers near the back wall with the rack in between. Since the De Capo's are rear-ported, would this seriously hinder sonic performance? I could place them at about a foot from the rear wall and not much more.

I haven't heard it yet, but I would also consider the Veena. Is it rear-ported too? Would it be too big for my small room?

Michel Fleury
VAUDREUIL, QC

Probably not, Michel, because the Veena is not substantially larger than the MM De Capo, and indeed its woofer is smaller. The notable difference, of course, is that the Veena doesn't need a stand. We prefer the De Capo, but since our review Reference 3a has announced a tweeter change.

Both the Veena and the MM De Capo are rear-ported, which means you cannot place them up against the wall. However in a small room a distance of a foot (30 cm) or slightly more from the wall is likely to be adequate. Placement close to a wall adds loading to the rear port, and therefore moves the low frequency cutoff higher. At the same time the "megaphone effect" of the wall-floor boundary can emphasize the bass that *is* reproduced. A distance of less than 30 cm from the rear wall would probably not give pleasant results.

My entry level system consists of an Atoll CD50, Atoll IN50 amplifier and a pair of Polk Audio RTi38 bookshelf speakers.

I'm considering either adding a Goldring GR2 (or Rega P3) turntable, or getting a pair of second-hand Totem Model One speakers (in good condition for about $1000). Which purchase would give me the most significant increase in sound quality?

Bo Jiang
DORVAL, QC

We are tempted to point out the obvious: the Totems will add immensely to the sound of your system, but if you try to play an LP on a loudspeaker you are likely to be disappointed! For that you definitely need…a turntable.

Consider these factors. First, can your amplifier drive the Model One to a level you will find satisfactory? The IN50 is the smallest of the Atoll amplifiers, rated at 50 watts per channel into 8 ohms. What's more, its power into a 4 ohm load is just 40% higher, at 70 watts, which suggests that it has limited current capacity. If you do get the Model One, chances are the amplifier will be next on your upgrade list.

Then consider how much of the music you like is available on LP. In the case of the classical repertoire, adding either the Goldring or the Rega opens up the possibilities of bargains galore. The same is true of classic jazz (Shelly Mann, Ray Brown, Herbie Hancock, the Modern Jazz Quartet, etc.), but possibly not current artists.

Being a rank beginner audiophile, I occasionally (all right, it's all the time) become quite confused, especially when it comes to cables, power cords and power converters. One person's advice: power cords first! The next: no power cords until you clean up the juice with a power converter! The next: the power converter will screw up everything, don't do it!

I'm lost. It seems to me that the power converters would be a good thing. I can't see that the juice coming from my (upgraded) home outlet is going to benefit my system until it's gone through some sort of transformation, otherwise it seems that I'm just getting whatever level of performance is available at the outlet, no matter how good the power cord. I hate to waste money on the wrong thing, so which should be first? Do I just go all out and do both?

My system includes a Cary 2A3-Si, Linn Ikemi, and Soliloquy SM-2A3's. Then

there's the question of speaker cable and the connections between the CD/amp. Is my little system worth the really good stuff? I don't want to spend more than I can afford, yet I want to get the best results and sound I can. Everybody I talk to has an opinion, they're just all different!

Arlan Sanford
SANTA FE, NM

Of course we have an opinion too, Arlan, and one more opinion on top of the ones you've already heard is possibly not what you hoped for. Still, if we explain *why* we think what we do, you'll be in a better position to make sense of the other advice you've received.

Perhaps we can begin with a light bulb joke that ran in our pages some years ago:

Q: How many hi-fi gurus does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None, because there's no point in changing the bulb until you've installed the right cables.

Sound familiar?

The truth is that all of these upgrades, if they're done right, will make your system sound better, and if you can afford them all, then do them all, no question. If you can't reasonably do that, then spend the money in the order that will give you the biggest audible difference for each upgrade.

The cheapest upgrade is not even on your list: changing the duplex outlet in the wall. Hardware store outlets have been getting worse and worse with the years because despite inflation their price keeps dropping. The connection they give you is dreadful. The reason hospitals don't have those is that a poor connection can result in arcing and sparks, and sparks are what you don't want in a ward where there's oxygen flowing. You also don't want a dodgy connection on a piece of medical gear that cost a couple of million bucks. We suggest you settle for nothing less.

With that done, let's have a look at what a better power cable can do for you. The upscale connectors on a good cord will, like the better outlet, give you a tighter connection with less noise generated by the connection itself, and with less loss of voltage too. What's more, a power cable that's any good will be shielded. That prevents it from picking



up radio-frequency noise and feeding it into the system through the ground, and it also prevents certain components, particularly digital components, from radiating digital noise where it can get into places it shouldn't. Though some power cables have price tags that can induce cardiac arrest (another reason they use hospital grade connectors, perhaps), some affordable ones offer both shielding and good connectors.

Shielded power cables, by the way, have generally more capacitance than the cheap cables that no doubt came with your gear, and that is already enough to filter out a little of the high frequency hash that comes from the power company. To finish the job it's useful to add a good power filter, but as you already know good ones don't come cheap. Some of them, what's more, can actually make your system sound worse, hence the warning from some experts. In particular, filters that limit current can adversely affect power amplifiers.

And we haven't yet gotten to the speaker cables and interconnects. If you're using the cheap junk that is available free or almost free, then changing it is virtually an emergency measure.

I have just completed the removal of the Valhalla board, AC motor, switch and associated cables on a Linn LP12 turntable and replaced them with the Origin Live Advanced DC motor kit. The results are nothing short of impressive and seem (by your description) to be very similar in character to the improvements realized with the Lingo

I was wondering if you had ever heard the mod, and how it compares to the Lingo. I'm sure Linn is not in favor of this type of behavior but I would guess some UHF *subscribers (like me) wouldn't mind seeing a comparison of the available PSU options that can drive the LP12. Considering the cost of Lingo upgrades, these alternative mods start to look pretty good.*

Nick Dudley
PORT COQUITLAM, BC

Nick, many years ago we did a direct comparison between a stock Linn LP-12 and an LP-12 that had been upgraded with a subchassis made from a more exotic material. The one with the new subchassis sounded better. Now here's where it gets interesting. One of our then staff members, Henry See, was looking for a good turntable, and he was offered either of the Linns at the same price. Despite the fact he had participated in the comparison, he chose the stock Linn.

Now why would he do that? He explained the reason for his choice: the upgraded LP-12 did sound audibly better, but it wasn't a Linn anymore. There was reason to believe that Linn would be offering more upgrades in the future — indeed it already was — but if Henry bought the modified LP-12 none of those upgrades would ever be available to him. In retrospect he was right. Today's Linns, even those that have not had the full tilt upgrades, sound way better than the modded LP-12 Henry turned down.

To be sure, what was true then may or may not be true in 2006. Linn's turntable sales are today a tiny fraction of its business, and it isn't certain that future upgrades will amount to more than tinkering. A third party improvement

may now, therefore, make sense. Or it may not. It's your choice which horse to bet on.

A true test would require having two LP-12's that are absolutely identical, getting one of them modified, and then having both properly adjusted by someone who didn't have a vested interest in the outcome. It's not the sort of demo any store is likely to offer.

I recently wrote to you questioning if I needed to have my speakers connected to my tube amp even if I was listening to it via the headphones. You expected that my headphones would provide sufficient load on the amp, and that the speakers did not need to be connected. But I expect that one day I will turn on the amp and will have forgotten to either attach the speakers or the headphones, and then…

So, I would like to make a pair of 8 ohm resistors. Can this be done easily from a pair of speaker binding post soldered up to a 8 ohm resistors, or is it more complicated than that? If it is a DIY project, how do I do it? I don't trust the guy at The Source.

Tim Leeney
GEORGETOWN, ON

We're not sure why you want those 8 ohm resistors, Tim. You can't leave them connected all the time, and the danger remains that you might turn on the amplifier when none of the loads is connected: speakers, phones or resistors.

That said, we can understand why you're wary of the people at The Source (full name, for the benefit of non-Canadians, is *The Source by Circuit City*, the sign affixed to what used to be Radio Shack stores). The resistors you're likely to find there have a power rating of a quarter watt, and we're being optimistic. Put any amount of power into one, and…poof! Followed by possibly another poof from a tube in your amplifier.

You'll need a power resistor from an electronics supply house, and you may have to put several resistors together to get the rating you need. When we made up the dummy load we use in amplifier tests, we purchased three large precision 24 ohm resistors and connected them in parallel (24 divided by 3 is 8). If we had found 2 ohm resistors, we could have wired four of them in series (four times 2 ohms is 8).

I just replaced my aging Dual turntable with a Goldring GR2. I also replaced my Rotel RQ970 with an ASL Phono LUX DT. The Dual had a Grado Green cartridge with a 5 mV output. The GR2 uses the Goldring 1012GX, with a 6.5 mV output. The ASL phono stage has 41 dB of gain. Is this combination too much gain? I don't know the gain on the Rotel, but with my old combo I had to turn up the volume much more to get an equivalent output level (as CD). The current Goldring/ASL combo is at least the same, but probably slightly more than what I get from most CD's.

What are the drawbacks of this combo? Should I be looking for a lower gain phono preamp, or should I stop worrying and enjoy the music?

Tim Leeney
GEORGETOWN, ON

We suggest enjoying the music, Tim. It's normal to hear some hiss when you turn up the volume on a phono stage. A worse sign would be hum that is louder than the hiss. The output voltage from even a moving magnet phono pickup is a thousand times lower than that from a CD player or other component. What's important is that the noise not be noticeable from listening position even in a quiet room.

The output difference between the Grado and Goldring cartridges is not significant, a mere 2.3 dB. Even so, it could be accounted for merely by differences in testing methods of the two companies. Those figures are what are called "nominal output." Translation: well, we had to say *something*.

I just picked up your magazine for the first time and love it. I especially enjoyed The High Fidelity Digital Jukebox (*in* UHF *No.74) and looked up your previous articles on the CEC DA53 and the iPod.*

I would like to know what would be necessary to make a "hi-fi" system with this technique. I would start fresh and abandon all my mid-fi and at this point would use a CD or DVD player and stream music via Wi-Fi or LAN. Thus I am most interested in playing music from digital sources. I would like to start building my system, so could you list the components in order of necessity? I already have a computer, iTunes (I use Apple Lossless) and a network.

Derek Sou
VICTORIA, BC

Derek, this issue includes a review of the Slim Devices Squeezebox, which may be one key to getting the best possible sound from your computer. The Squeezebox connects by Ethernet or Wi-Fi, and it can feed a digital signal into a genuine hi-fi system. Using the Apple Lossless codec is the right choice in our view. Anyone not able to use iTunes can download the Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC), available for all computer platforms including Linux, Unix, Solaris, plus some we've never heard of. It's at http://flac.sourceforge.net. Actually, if your computer is near your music system and it has a digital output, you don't even need the Squeezebox.

The idea of getting a digital signal from the computer or the accessory box is to avoid letting cheap computer gear handle the digital-to-analog conversion. That means you'll need a good quality external converter, which could turn out to be your most expensive single component. If you want to be able to play CDs directly, look for a good CD player which also has a digital input.

Then add what you can afford in the way of an integrated amplifier and loudspeakers. Both should be made by companies that also make the products you wish you could afford.

First of all I want to tell you how much I love reading your magazine. I am very

familiar with many of the audiophile magazines, and I think yours is the most objective and informative of all of them. It makes me proud to know that such a great magazine comes from Canada.

Now on to the CEC DA53 converter. After reading your review in UHF *No. 72, I purchased a DA53 and it is very good. As you noted in your review, it certainly adds punch to CDs. Like you, I was most interested in its versatility and particularly its ability to be used with an iPod.*

The only problem is that I haven't been able to figure out how to connect it to the iPod. I would still like to know how you guys connected an iPod to the DA 53.

John Lorito
OAKVILLE, ON

In fact, John, we jumped the gun on the question of connecting the iPod to a DAC. We had no difficulty connecting our computer to the DA53, and we made the assumption that, since the iPod can connect to a USB network, the two were made to go together. That doesn't appear to be true.

But we haven't given up. We have talked with two accessory companies (one of them Griffin, which brings out clever iPod accessories almost daily) about making an adapter to get pure digital from the iPod. We know the signal's in there, and it appears that there's at least one device, Apple's penny dreadful "iPod Hi-Fi," that can get access to it. We hope to crack the secret, and we'll let you know how we do.

If the Cambridge DiscMagic/DACMagic are a matching pair, why is the DAC input limited to coax BNC, when the transport has an XLR output?

Furthermore: this may be relevant (it's from Audio Asylum):

Join the two "hot" wires from the AES plug side into the single "hot" on the RCA side. Keep ground on AES to ground on the RCA side. It works but is not ideal, as an AES cable needs to be 110 ohm impedance and an SPDIF (coax) is 75 ohms. Be aware that the SPDIF digital signal is a +0.5 v to -0.5 v signal and an AES signal is +5.0 v to -5.0 v, but this should not be an issue, because most DACs wont bother about this..

Does the above DIY make any sense, or is the transformer to match impedance absolutely necessary, if not advisable?

James Tay
TORONTO, ON

The Audio Asylum instructions you quote for matching a balanced output to an unbalanced input won't work, James, and it's obvious on the face of it. Mix together a positive voltage and a negative voltage of the same value, and what do you get? Zilch. Whoever posted this hasn't tried it, or else loves the sound of silence.

If you want to try a more rational method for adapting balanced to unbalanced, these are the pin readouts: pin 1 is ground, pin 2 is "hot" or positive and pin 3 is negative (it's the inverted version of the signal on pin 2). However there is *absolutely no point* in using the balanced input or output on one component unless the other component is also balanced. We should also add that a lot of "balanced" components are not balanced at all, because the goofs who designed them don't understand what balancing is or what it's for. And if "balancing" has been accomplished by adding an extra circuit, perhaps an op amp chip, you can guess what the result will be.

I have been reading your reviews on two integrated amplifiers, the Copland CTA-405 and the Audiomat Opéra, and they both seem like they offer a lot of refinement for the money. Could you please guide me towards the best sounding of the two regardless of their price difference?

I also noted that in both your reviews on these amplifiers there was a moment where they seemed to sound more enjoyable than the reference system, and on that particular note it seems that the Copland definitely had the edge over the Opéra at sounding better than the reference system. Is it possible that the Copland 405 is better than the Opéra? Please help me buy either of these as to the best sounding amplifier of the two.

Laurent Shriqui
MONTRÉAL, QC

You aren't the first to ask this, Laurent. We should explain that the two amplifiers were not reviewed on the same

system. The Audiomat Opéra, with its much larger power supply, was listened to on the Omega system, because we thought (correctly as it turned out) that it could handle our Reference 3a Supremas, with their push-pull passive subwoofers. The Copland CTA-405 would no doubt have had a more difficult time delivering the current needed, and so we made the decision to listen to it in the Alpha system, with our Living Voice Avatar speakers. The Copland's excellent performance pointed up what we had been suspecting: that an upgrade of the Alpha system might be in order. That has since been done.

I have the following eight-year old system: Linn Classik, Linn LK100 and Linn Keileigh speakers. I have a budget of about £2000. Could you suggest what the best upgrade route would be?

Darren Gibson
BRIGHTON, Sussex, UK

We wish we could make all of this section available free, but our accountant has this little thing about us staying in business. Ah well!

But the rest of the issue can of course be seen whole. You have your choice of the print version or the electronic version.

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Speaker Impedance

What is the impedance of your loudspeakers? Is it 8 ohms? Or 4 ohms? Perhaps you know that it is not just a single number, but what difference does it make anyway?

At the very least you are no doubt aware that a speaker with a very low impedance can present a problem for an amplifier, and potentially can damage it. Think about the fact that short-circuiting an amplifier output can either break it, or blow a fuse, or trigger a protection circuit. The lower the impedance of a loudspeaker, the closer it comes to being a short circuit. Some amplifiers can drive a load of 2 Ω or even 1 Ω, but most will not. (The Greek letter Omega is of course the symbol for resistance). In any case, low impedance may not be your only worry.

With this issue, *UHF* intends to begin publishing impedance curves for loudspeakers reviewed, and for that reason I have been asked to explain speaker impedance, and also to suggest a simple manner of measuring a speaker's impedance. "Simple" in this case means using a minimum of specially-purchased equipment, though in day-to-day operation it is less simple than using a purpose-built instrument that can spit out a complete impedance graph in a few seconds. Yes, impedance measurements result in a graph, not just the single figure usually found in loudspeaker literature, but let me begin with some basic concepts.

by Paul Bergman

What is impedance?

If a loudspeaker were to be driven by DC (direct current) we could speak simply of its *resistance*. The speaker's internal wiring has a certain (low) resistance, as does the fine wire that makes up each driver's voice coil. However loudspeakers are intended to be driven by AC (alternating current), whose frequency of alternation is that of the sound we are attempting to reproduce. Thus we need to take into account the speaker's *inductance* and *capacitance*. The voice coil is an inductor, and the internal wiring may be as well. Inductance can be thought of as a resistance that is frequency-dependent, with its ohm value rising as frequency drops. Most crossover networks include capacitors, which introduce capacitance. A capacitor can *also* be thought of as a frequency-dependent resistor, whose ohm value rises with frequency. Since a capacitor's impedance characteristic is exactly opposite to that of an inductor, it is easy to see how capacitors and inductors can be combined to make filters.

I shall add, without great elaboration, that these are not the only factors determining the impedance reflected back to the amplifier. For example, as a woofer cone moves back and forth, acting as a linear motor, it *also* acts as a generator, actually generating a voltage that is opposite to that coming from the amplifier. That this complicates things is an understatement.

It must also be evident that, in a speaker that combines resistance, inductance and resistance, the total *impedance* cannot be a single number, since it will inevitably vary with frequency. This is not typically taken into consideration by designers of amplifiers, who test their designs by loading them with an 8 ohm resistor, possessing neither capacitance nor inductance, and having a constant impedance at all frequencies.

The ideal, and the practical

The closer a speaker is to a pure resistance, the more confidence an amplifier designer can have that his product will behave in the customer's home exactly as it did on the test bench. That said, few loudspeakers are very much like resistors at all, and so in fact amplifiers must be designed to operate with impedances that are vastly different from that ideal resistor. What is more, the designer cannot know in advance the characteristics of the speakers that will be used with his product.

To see what he (and we) are up against, let us look at the impedance curve of a small two-way speaker, which has a famous name I do not propose to reveal. It is shown on the next page.

The curve has been drawn by a technique I shall describe presently (see *Measuring Impedance* on page 20). Most speakers, I might add by way of explanation, have a considerable peak in impedance at the point of resonance of the woofer and cabinet. The one I have arbitrarily selected has only a small rise, centred around 100 Hz, which would be the practical lower limit of its bass response.

The manufacturer's nominal impedance rating is 4 Ω, but you need only glance at the curve to see that it deviates from that rating quite considerably. It dips to about 3 Ω at 16 Hz, which should present little problem for an amplifier designed the least bit competently.

Rather more formidable is the higher part of the curve, specifically the impedance at 6 kHz. As you can see, it rises well over 20 Ω. What will this mean for the poor amplifier?

Let us consider first a solid state amplifier, the type most people use. It is common for an amplifier to have

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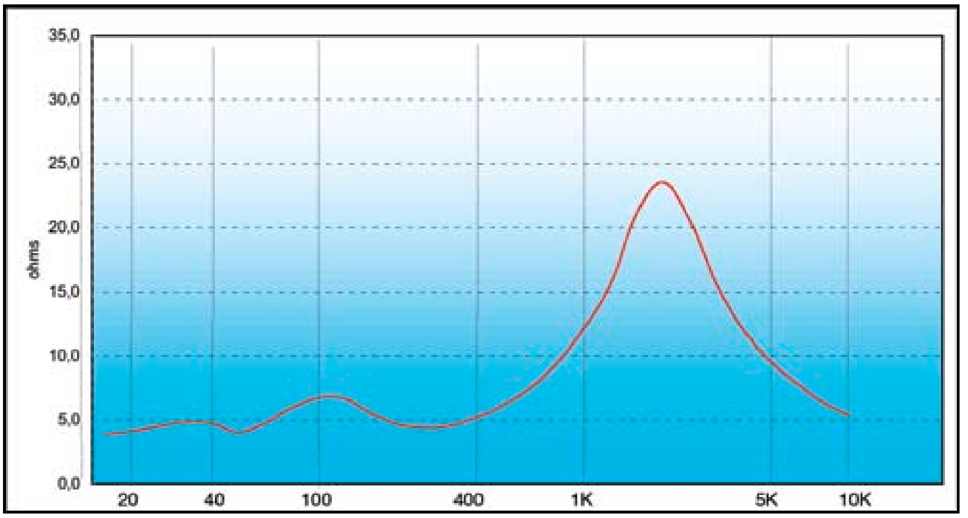
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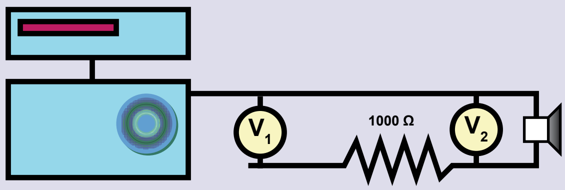
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Measuring impedance

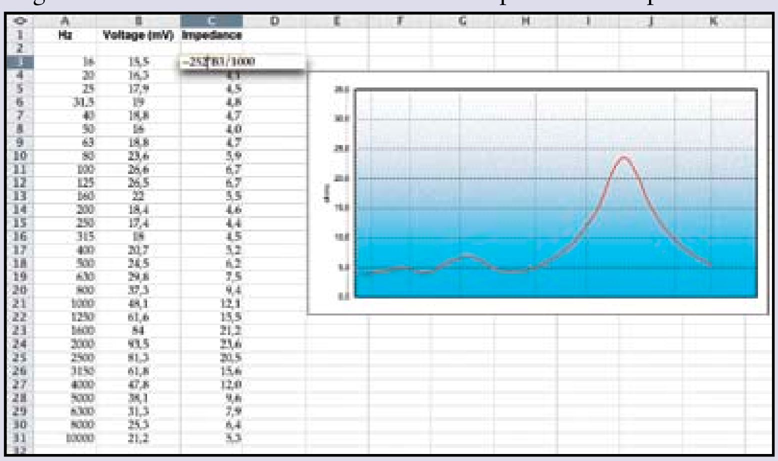
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20	16,3	[illegible]
25	17,9	4,5
31,5	19	4,8
40	18,8	4,7
50	16	4,0
63	18,8	4,7
80	23,6	5,9
100	26,6	6,7
125	26,5	6,7
160	22	5,5
200	18,4	4,6
250	17,4	4,4
315	18	4,5
400	20,7	5,2
500	24,5	6,2
630	29,8	7,5
800	37,3	9,4
1000	48,1	12,1
1250	61,6	15,5
1600	84	21,2
2000	93,5	23,6
2500	81,3	20,5
3150	61,8	15,6
4000	47,8	12,0
5000	38,1	9,6
6300	31,3	7,9
8000	25,3	6,4
10000	21,2	5,3

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Montréal 2006

It seems forever that the Montreal show has been at the Delta hotel, right downtown. The Delta was a great venue for hi-fi companies looking for solidly-built rooms whose acoustics you could work with. It *wasn't* so good for those needing vast space, and the show had long spilled over into adjacent hotels. This time organizer Marie-Christine Prin intended to attract other consumer electronics firms: Sony, Toshiba, Nikon, perhaps even (snicker!) Apple Computer. Hence the shift to the Centre Sheraton, also downtown.

I was the one snickering about Apple, but guess what…Apple was there.

UHF was not, however. Unlike the varied hotel rooms at the Delta, the Sheraton rooms are too small for what we do. We made up for it (sort of) by putting a "virtual room" on the Internet, (complete with a system that could be seen and examined, if not actually heard), which remained open through mid-April. Our absence meant that both Albert and I had plenty of time to tour. Albert's account follows this one.

The official guide to the show, by the way, had a hopeful photo of a Nikon camera, but Nikon wasn't there. It could have been worse…imagine Nikon hadn't come and Canon had! On the other hand Sony did have some cameras there, including the DSC-R1, which Albert and I had a great demo of. After the show we bought one…and the product pictures in this issue (except for the show pictures) were taken with it.



For several years the show has been affiliated with a good cause, research into children's diseases. Proceeds of the official show CD have gone to that cause.

by Gerard Rejskind

This year the cause also had an official spokesman, actor Rémy Girard, shown on this page with Marie-Christine. Girard will be familiar to worldwide movie audiences as the man in the hospital bed in the Oscar-winning film *The Barbarian Invasions.*

Did the show's shift in venue and orientation pay off? At show's end Marie-Christine told me it definitely had, and I talked to a number of exhibitors who were ecstatic…the ones in the large rooms and salons. I also talked to less happy exhibitors, who had found the hotel rooms too squeezed, the entranceways to them too narrow, and the acoustics…well, it's a hotel, isn't it? I have no idea whether the happy ones or the unhappy ones predominated.

Notwithstanding the show's ambitions to be a sort of mini-CES, this is a *consumer* show, not a *trade* show, and it is therefore normal for local dealers to be major exhibitors, albeit with the support of their suppliers. And thus there were large rooms backed by such stores as Audioville, Coup de Foudre and Codell. *Not* at the show was the largest of these dealers, Audio Centre. I had heard before the show that this suburban store would move back to its old building (*very* old, in fact) to save money. Rumor said that it was just…gone.

I've often deplored that the Totem Mani-2 loudspeaker (reviewed in this issue) is never heard at shows. It was there this time, in the Audioville room (see the photo at lower right on the next page), driven by Conrad-Johnson gear. As usually happens when it is demonstrated, visitors commented on how amazing it was to hear a small speaker filling that huge space.

The official show CD, a music sampler, is produced by a local high end recording company, Fidelio. The company had brought not only its own CDs but also its Nagra master recorder, shown on the next page. I got to hear the master tape of a new percussion SACD the company was launching. It's tough for other exhibitors to compete with *that.*

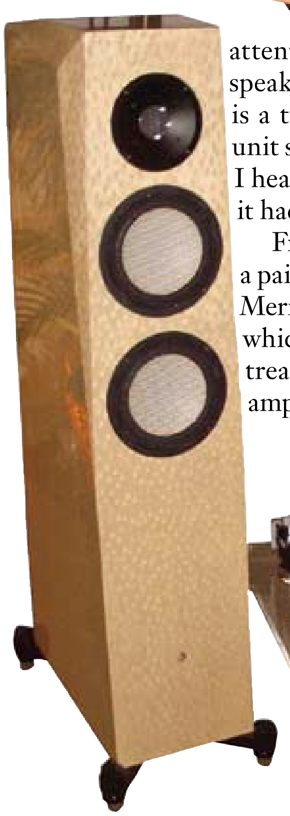


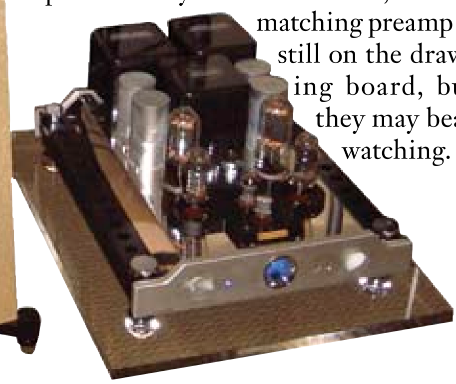


Aurum Acoustics (from Newfoundland) was back with the final version of its astonishing tri-amplified loudspeaker (it comes with its own amps, four of which are single-ended tube units). Now that the system (including the manifestly excellent CD player/preamplifier) is entering production, our interest in doing an in-depth review has definitely perked up.

Aurum is not the only high end company situated well outside metropolitan centres. From Mascouche (a medium-sized town just far enough from Montreal to qualify as more than just a suburb) came the Revelation Mistral S-5 (its picture is on page 25). It caught my attention because, like the Reference 3a speakers in our Omega reference system, it is a two-piece speaker: a smaller two-way unit sitting on a massive subwoofer. When I heard it, driven by Exposure electronics, it had a simply huge sound.

From closer to us came an amplifier and a pair of small speakers, under the name of Merikaudio. The company is in Longueuil, which in case you don't know is the Montreal suburb where *UHF* is located. The amplifier is not yet in its final form, and the matching preamp is still on the drawing board, but they may bear watching.







One of the nicer rooms belonged to a Canadian company not that well known even in its home country, LaHave. Its Wedge speaker is on page 28. It's pleasant musicality kept me in the room for a while on the third day.

The amplifier at bottom left caught my eye too, because I had noticed it in an ad in our last issue. It's the Audio Space, and it's next to the JAS Odin loudspeaker. Yes, the speakers have ceramic woofers. The price: C$7800. I must say that the demo I heard was worth sitting down and listening to for a bit.

I've often heard the huge wooden Edgarhorn, shown at left, at CES. I had never been very happy with it, but it actually sounded quite good this time, with natural tonal balance, though (as is often the case with very large woofers) little in the way of a real stereo image. Dr. Bruce Edgar was there, and as you'll see from the next report Albert was impressed with neither the speaker nor Dr. Edgar.

In Vegas I had heard an oversized "bookshelf" speaker called the Escalante Fremont. This time I heard a smaller model, the Pinyon (above right). It looks rather conventional until you look closely at the metal-clad enclosure and the ring radiator tweeter. Like the Fremont, it sounded truly excellent.

Also sounding rather interesting was the Mirage OMD28. The new OMD series replaces the OM series, which replaced the M series. The $10K speaker has carbon fibre woofers and midrange, and a dome tweeter facing upward into a diffuser. Seeing how the company was rather disappointed with our review of one of its speakers in our last issue (see *Feedback* in this issue), I refrained from suggesting a review.

Regional show though this might be it does manage to pull in a few high end celebrities. VTL's Luke Manley was here last year. This year William Andrea of Mimetism was here (his integrated amplifier got a warm review in our pages in issue No. 74), and so was David Berning (you can see him on page 26). Berning had brought his newest preamplifier. His monoblock power amps, alas, were not quite done yet, though he had prototypes in unfinished form.



Also present was Linn's Martin McCue, who was showing some products that will





arrive in stores soon. That includes the Artikulat speakers (shown on page 27), and the new Majik strictly two-channel component series. I've already asked to review the Majik CD, which will replace both the Genki and Ikemi, with a price situated about midway. Before you ask, like the older models it will still have HDCD decoding.

I'm always happy to see (and especially *hear)* Sonus Faber speakers, and there were two new ones at the show. The Anniversario (extreme right) is gorgeous, as you'd expect, and it sounded luscious too. I saw but didn't hear the Guarneri, next to it, bearing serial number 002. Its projected price is C$14K, but if it's any consolation the stand is included.

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FEATURE

Touring the Old/New Show

by Albert Simon

"Look at the beautiful tubes,"said a visitor as he walked into the room, calling his friend over to a table display, completely oblivious to the music being played. There it is. I think I've cracked the mystery of why there are so few female audiophiles. While men and women may equally love listening to music, men have that unique tendency to also want to read about, to talk about and to argue about…the gear.



This article is about them *and* the gear, and most importantly about the sound and the music they listened to and their reactions to it. *Warning:* you will read about personal opinions. If you don't like personal opinions and prefer a detailed account of what was played and displayed, you might consider putting this magazine down and delving into the complete list of exhibitors and components available in the official brochure.

You may find praise in the next paragraphs, and occasionally harsh comments. However, this is not a listening test, by any means, and we won't blame anything unless we mean it specifically for the purpose of improvement.

"You must listen to these speakers," said Michael and Jimmy, as soon as we met in the lobby. "They're shaped like huge horns, and the sound is so natural and smooth," they added, pointing to the name of the Edgarhorn Titan II speakers on the brochure. Off we went.



Along the way we stopped by the Totem Acoustics home theatre demonstration. Neatly placed on the walls, front and back, the new, discreetly styled, 3.5" deep Tribe 1 and 2 speakers gave an absolutely spectacular performance of *Hero*, with the dramatic contribution of the Storm subwoofer. Played on the Arcam DV 78 player with Arcam's AVR, the sound was riveting and carried tons of impact while outlining the finest details.

I did return to that room more than once during the next days, with different visitors, and their reaction was always the same: they remained speechless. That such quality (and quantity!) could issue from such diminutive speakers was amazing.

We were no less impressed by the Simaudio room, where we listened to an excerpt from Holst's *The Planets*, played on the Andromeda CD player and power supply, the P-8 controller and preamplifier, the W-8 power amplifier and the large Dynaudio Confidence C-4 speakers. Before leaving the large room, Michael and Jimmy wanted to have their picture taken in front of the huge Simaudio monobloc power amp on display.

(Can you ever, ever imagine a female audiophile asking for a souvenir shot such as this?)

In the small Fidelio room, everything was quiet and refined. The first track of *Nemesis*, their latest album of percussion, was playing on an Esoteric deck through a Nagra PL-P preamp and a pair of pyramid-shaped Nagra PMA power amps, into Verity Audio's shiny black Parsifal speakers. "I feel good," said Michael, as we were going out into the hallway "Just a few minutes in that room and I feel so relaxed."



Soon after, Jimmy really wanted us to listen to the Revelation speakers, and as we walked in we noticed the energetic sound of the K&D Sessions handled with authority by the Revelation Mistral S-6 speakers (at right), helped by a pair of Odyssey Stratos power amps, a DSC VAC Auricle preamp, and a Naim CDX player. A request to play *Un Aeroplano a Vela*, a song by Gianmaria Testa from his CD *Montgolfières*, demonstrated convincingly the imaging capabilities of that system.

Just as fascinating was the sound of a ClearAudio turntable, playing *Take Five*, linked to a Korato Anniversary Series Reference Valve preamp, two Korato tube monob-

At top: Albert at work in the Bluenote room. *At left:* the Opera SP speakers. *At right:* the two-part Revelation speaker.



locks and a pair of large Villa-Reale speakers. It was a lively and wonderfully syncopated version of the legendary Brubeck composition.

We had another treat on LPs with *My Funny Valentine* from the 70's direct-to-disc album *The Great Jazz Trio Direct from L.A.*, with Hank Jones, played on a Brinkmann La Grange turntable and introducing the Brinkmann tone arm. That was followed, in the same room, by Rachmani-



nov's *Piano Concerto No. 3* on a completely rebuilt 1956 Thorens 124, with amplifiers by Brinkmann and Litho Phon speakers with ribbon tweeters.

Actually, turntables were almost everywhere this year, and we enjoyed tremendously the music of De Falla from his *Three Cornered Hat* ballet played on a Red Point turntable, a VAC Renaissance Signature preamp and a Manley Steelhead tube phono stage, amplified by a VAC Beampower amp linked to a pair of sculptured, large, shiny black Hansen speakers.

Michael was eager to try his CD of *Le Pacte des Loups*, on the Raysonic vacuum tube CD 128 player and the Raysonic SE-30-A integrated amplifier (shown above left). The opening track of this impressive film score sounded accurately dark and ominous on the new Living Voice IBX (Auditorium Series) speakers, similar to our reference OBX but with a built-in crossover filter.

As we walked toward another room, Jimmy suggested exhibitors should keep their doors shut and post a clear sign inviting people to walk in. The noise carried along the hallways (of male audiophiles talking passionately about…the gear, what else?) was always too invasive, and as a result, many rooms had to raise the sound to absurd levels. Michael nodded and remarked that this year he noticed how loud music was being played in most rooms. And by the way, during the three days of the Festival, that was the most common complaint I heard from a large number of visitors.

So here is a hint to those with have access to the volume control: *don't try to impress audiophiles by flattening them against the wall.* Strange as it may seem to some, most of us want to be soothed by good, rich, natural sound. When it's too loud, we can't hear it.

At left: the new CD player and integrated amplifier from Raysonic. *Below:* David Berning with his new preamplifier.

"And, yet," Jimmy added, "I can tell that the overall level of sound quality has increased, this year." We all agreed.

The next room was large and dark and all eyes were focused on the large, widely-spaced Lohengrin speakers by Verity Audio, flanking a pair of single-ended triode WAVAC monoblocs; huge, brightly lit amps delivering 150 watts each (one of them can be seen on the next page)! The source and control came from the trio of dCS Elgar, Purcell and Verdi. Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* filled the room smoothly, effortlessly, the musicians spread across the wide stage.

In another room soon after, Michael remarked again about the high sound level as single piano notes were struck repeatedly with a furious right hand. "Not to worry, " I said, "it sounds like the karate style of a *Three Blind Mice* recording." And sure enough! The new Mirage OMD-28's (Omnipolar Reference Speaker System) were doing their best with that recording, fed by a pair of Bryston 7B SST power amps, a Bryston preamp and power supply and an Arcam CD36 player, all filtered through a Torus Power Line conditioner.

Enjoy the rest of this article in our print issue, or in the electronic version, available from MagZee.

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Above: Aldburn's Mike Remington showing off the new Linn Artikulat speakers. *At right:* The Verity Lohengrin speaker, a Wavac 150 watt single-ended monoblock, and the prototype Merikaudio amplifier.

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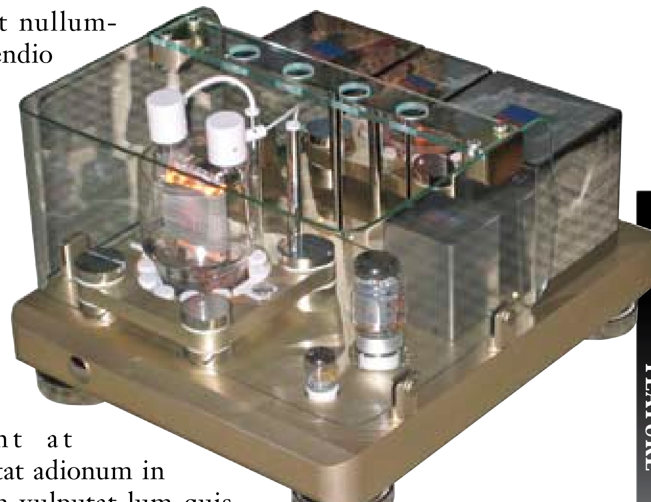
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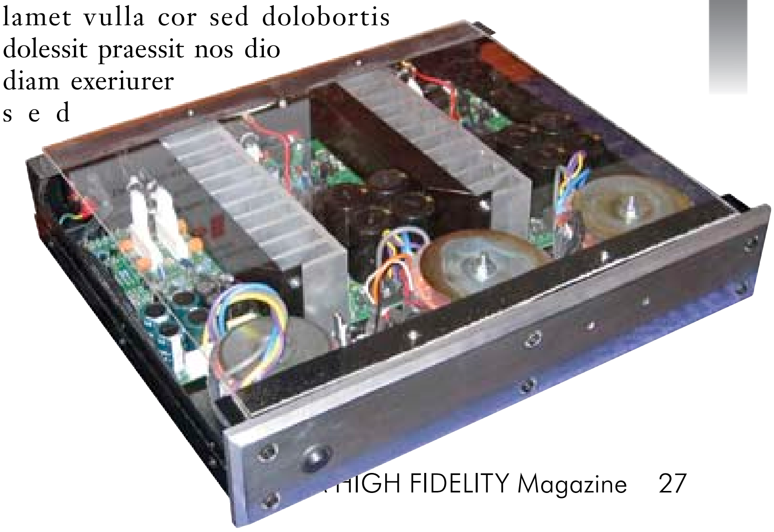
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At left: the Rogue Atlas tube power amp. *Below:* the Brinkmann LaGrange turntable, a rebuilt Thorens 124 table, and a Canadian speaker, the LeHave Wedge.

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Four turntables (clockwise): the Red Point, the Eurolab Cello, the Thorens TD350, and the Michell Orbe. *At left:* Michaël and Jimmy with earphones. *Below right:* Michaël and Gaetan listening at the end of a long show.

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TOTEM MANI-2 SIGNATURE

Were we the very first ever to review a Totem loudspeaker? We think so. It was of course the original Totem, the Model One. We were impressed with it, as we still are, and we eagerly awaited the Model Two. *This* was the Model Two, with a clever pun identifying it as the second model, all the while tying it to the company's faux Native image.

The Mani-2, first reviewed in *UHF* No. 43, impressed us too. Though in pictures it looks like a slightly larger Model One, it is different in both configuration and sound. With its twin woofer setup, it was capable of very deep bass that was perfectly controlled right down to its lower limits. We concluded that the Mani-2 was one of the world's truly great loudspeakers.

It did, however, have an Achilles' heel. Its configuration was accompanied by a strange impedance curve unlike that anticipated by most amplifier designers. Even Totem's own (short-lived) Amber amplifier was not recommended. An inadequate amplifier could actually damage the Mani-2!

But oh, how it sang when properly driven! We recall taking a pair of them to a show right after our review. The first afternoon a blind visitor spent a quarter hour listening before asking us *what subwoofer we were using.*

Superficially the Mani-2 looks like a bigger version of the Model One, with its attractive finish (mahogany is our favorite) and its rounded sides, with gleaming WBT binding posts at the rear. Not visible from the outside is that, behind the woofer is a *second* woofer, connected in tandem so that the two move in and out together. That gives the Mani-2 its unique way with extreme bass and dynamics…and also gives headaches to amplifier designers. Just as invisible is that the cabinet is veneered *inside* as well as outside, to prevent warping of the monocoque structure. The inside is not stuffed with mineral wool, as most speakers are. Damping is done with borosilicate, an anti-vibration coating used in aerospace applications, long ago adopted by Totem for its speakers.

Since our original review the Mani-2 has been considerably revised, raising its efficiency somewhat and making it less fragile. And it is now available as a Signature version. Would we be as delighted as we had been a decade and a half ago?

We set up a two-part review. We would begin in our Alpha room, where we had listened to the earlier Mani-2 (since that was our *only* listening room back then). We would then move to the much larger Omega room, and put the Mani-2 up against our vaunted Reference 3a Supremas.

The Alpha room

The room is rather small, but our Living Voice speakers are quite comfy about 30 cm from the absorbent rear wall. The tonal balance of the Mani-2's was a little strange in that position. Pulling them another 15 cm closer to us did the trick. Note that our photo shows the speakers sitting on a pair of Totem's own T4L steel stands (C$775/US$750). Using them would have meant filling them with sand, however, and we opted instead for our own extremely dead Foundation stands. Dollops of Audio-Tak held the speakers tight.

The power amplifier in that room is a Simaudio Moon W-5LE, which is explicitly *not* recommended for the Mani-2's. We were told off the record

that it would be all right if we didn't turn up the volume too high (loose translation: on New Years' Eve keep the inebriates away from the system). However we did have to run the system louder than usual, because the Mani-2's 85 dB sensitivity is *way* below that of nearly all contemporary speakers. You'll be needing some watts!

We began the Alpha listening session with the dramatic *Percussion Concerto* by Joseph Schwanter (from the *Poetics* CD, Klavier K11153).

For the rest of this fascinating review through two of our reference systems, check either the print or the full electronic version.

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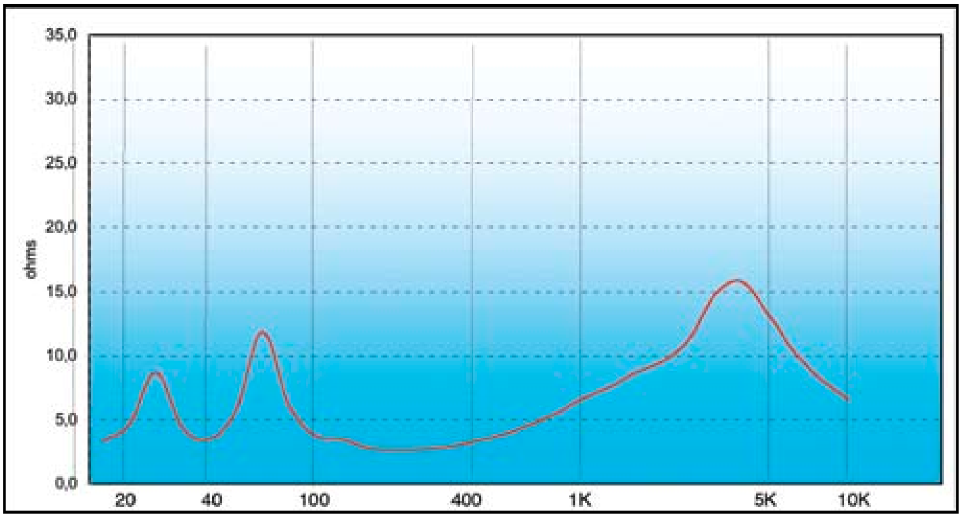
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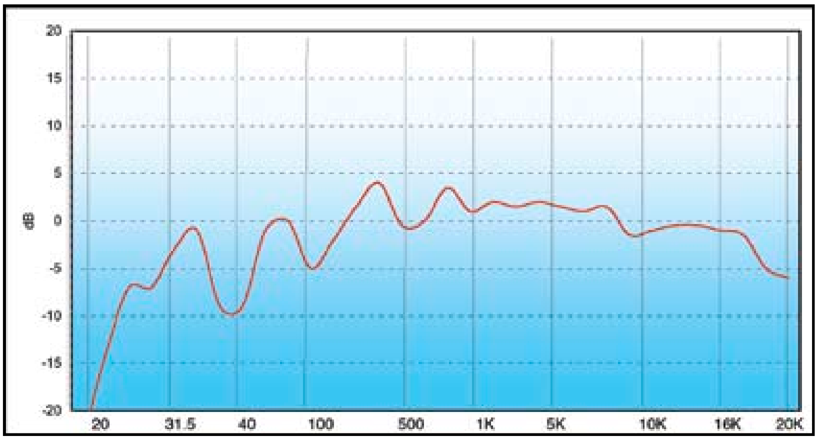
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Summing it up...

Brand/model: Totem Mani-2
Price: C$5595/US$4595
Size (HWD): 42 x 21 x 30.5 cm
Sensitivity: 85 dB
Impedance (claimed): 4 ohms
Most liked: Dunt laoreet volore magna alit
Least liked: Et dolessi tis ad euipisit nullutem in henisisl
Verdict: Vel ea alit lore tat

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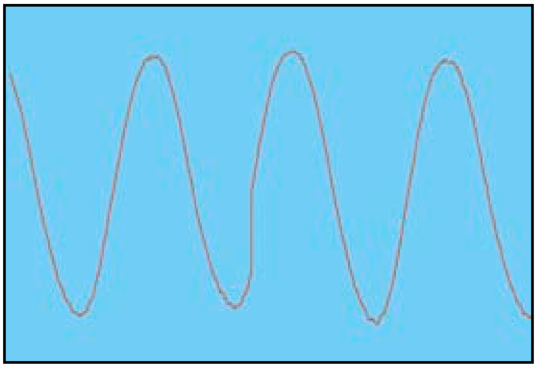
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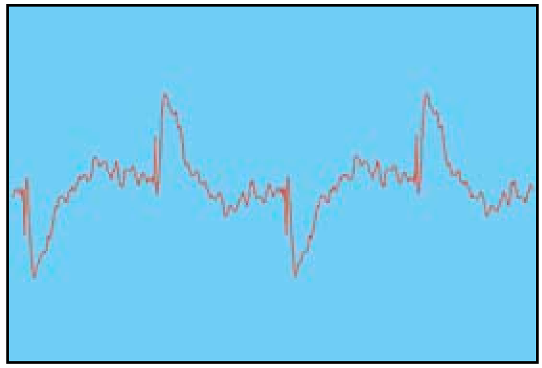
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Elac 204

Does the name ring a bell? Mention ELAC and we think of turntables of long ago, or more recently of phono cartridges. Indeed, ELAC (the name is a contraction of *Electroacustic)* was the first to make a relatively inexpensive phono cartridge with a Van den Hul profiled stylus. That turned out not to be a great idea, but its heart was in the right place.

And now ELAC has brought out the first inexpensive speaker with a Heil tweeter. Not all the company's speakers are this size or this price either, but once again its heart is in the right place. Oskar Heil's famous tweeter has long been admired for its exemplary smoothness, and indeed for the lack of peakiness that is found in nearly all conventional tweeters.

So where have we seen it before? Well, the Oskar Aulos, a smallish speaker with a similar tweeter was on the cover of *UHF* No. 57. And its larger brother, the Kithara, was reviewed in issue No. 59. Subsequently Albert purchased it. But none of these speakers cost as little as this one. The finish, designed for modern decors, belies the cost, as do of course the drivers used. The woofer is a sandwich of paper and aluminum. And the "JET" tweeter is ELAC's own version of Oskar Heil's "Air Motion Transformer." From 2.8 kHz up it does the heavy lifting.

We set the speakers up on our Foundation stands and connected them to our Alpha system. It took very little fiddling with the placement before we were happy with the image and the balance. The speakers come with foam "muffs" that can be placed in the rear port for placement close to a wall, but we didn't use them.

We opened the session with the SACD version of the famed Proprius choral recording, *Now the Green Blade Riseth* (PRSACD9093). We've heard both the male and female voices sound hideous on speakers far more expensive than these, and we were pleased to note that the ELACs reproduced them pleasantly. We were hoping for great smoothness in the highs from the famous tweeter, and we got it, except for…

Except for what? Do check out the full version of this review in the print or electronic version.

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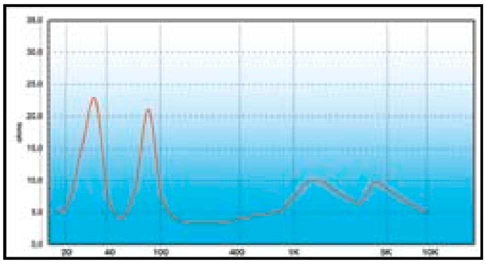
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Summing it up…

Brand/model: ELAC 204.2
Price: C$1650
Size (HWD): 33 x 20 x 28.5 cm
Sensitivity: 88 dB
Impedance (claimed): 4 ohms
Most liked: Deliciously smooth highs
Least liked: It's a *little* speaker, remember?
Verdict: A high end that's *really* high end



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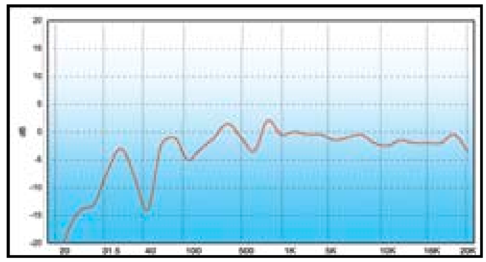
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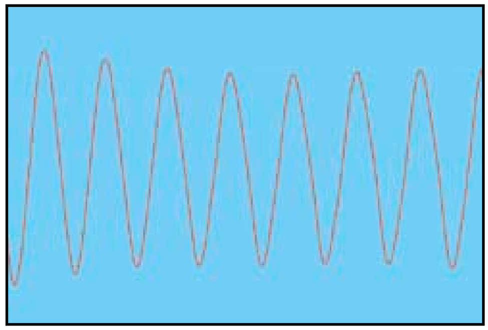
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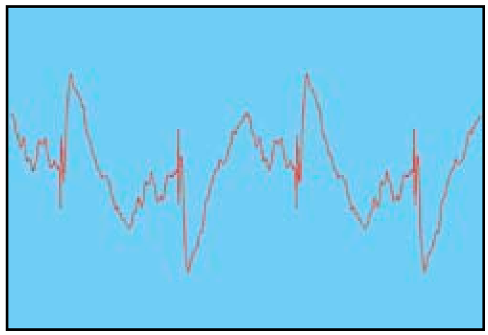
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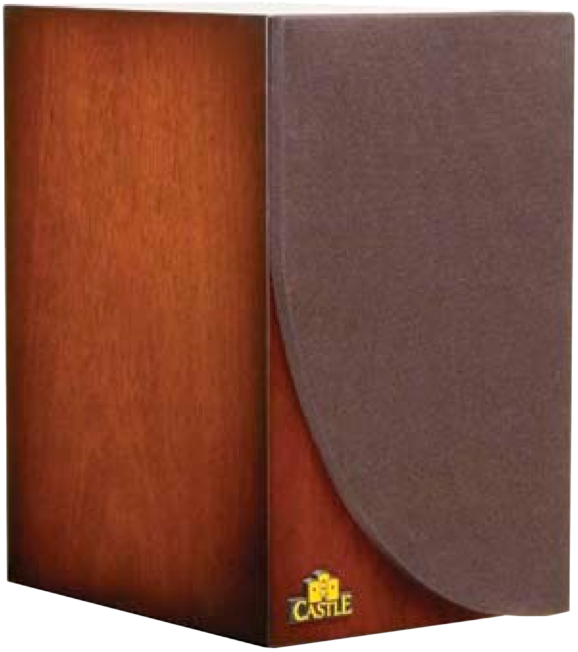
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Castle Richmond 3i

So here's Castle again…with a new Canadian distributor, but then again new ownership too. Castle was founded many years ago by a group of former Wharfedale executives, who had left when the aptly-named Rank organization had bought Wharfedale. Those execs are now retired, and Castle was bought by…a group of Wharfedale execs. *Plus ça change…*

This very small and inexpensive speaker is very much a Castle, though. Notice the 13 cm carbon fibre woofer (with a cast metal basket, which of course you can't see), and the "upside down" configuration. Notice the subtle shape of the Skipton castle pressed into the soft dome tweeter face plate. Notice the fine finish, brighter in the centre, darker at the edges. Inhale the furniture oil while you're at it.

Then look at the rear for the cheap plastic binding posts Castle has long used on its economy speakers. Only you won't find them. These gold-colored posts are better than most.

We set the Richmonds up on our Foundation stands (which cost more than the speakers themselves do), connected them to our Alpha system, and pulled out a few potentially difficult recordings.

The first was our familiar choral recording, but from the SACD version (Proprius PRSACD9093). Albert and Gerard had plenty of praise for the great clarity of the choral voices, for the way we could pick them out individually, and yet for the way they hung together. The rhythm was at least reasonable, the recording's great depth reduced but not destroyed.

And yet not everything was perfect. In one passage the women took on a "honky" tone, and Reine liked neither the male voices nor the counterpoint with the flute. Albert would have liked a little more energy. Turning up the volume helped, but these little speakers are not designed to be run that loud, and we backed off again..

With a large-scale orchestral recording (Beethoven's *Symphony No.5*, PentaTone 5186 102) we realized again how easy it is to run these speakers too loud.

The violins were first to tip us off and cry for mercy. Once we found the right compromise the Richmonds surprised us with their energetic sound and the coherent way they made sense of Beethoven's complex orchestration. The music was, by turns, lyrical and lively. The stereo image was precise, each orchestral section well anchored in space. Well…space is perhaps the wrong word, because the depth was all but absent.

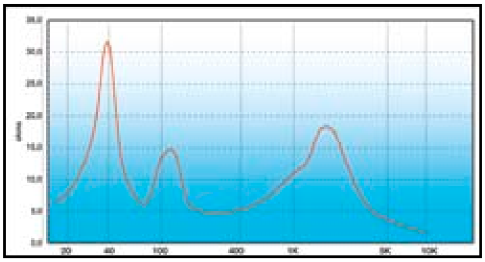
We were in the mood to make this speaker work hard! We turned to a DVD-A of the Ray Brown Trio's *Take the 'A' Train* (from *Soular Energy*, Hi-Res HRM-2011). Through such small speakers this recording should have been unrecognizable, but that's not what happened. Brown's powerful bass was surprisingly lively and rhythmic, though of course we heard the slap of the strings more than the resonance of the instrument body. Pianist Gene Harris really pounds the right side of his keyboard in this piece, and the notes had a decidedly hard edge. "But that's the way he plays," said Albert. Both the bass and the (subtle) percussion kept the swing on track. "What I like," said Gerard, "was that even when these speakers play too loud and they harden up, they never get blurry or fuzzy. They stay clean."

We wondered how well they could render the expressive voice of jazz singer *extraordinaire* Margie Gibson (*Say It With Music*, Sheffield CD-36). They did more than honorably, with only a touch of hardness here and there, but lots of clarity and expressiveness in the song itself. We liked the sensuous way Gibson glides along a note before settling on its perfect pitch (actually we *always* like it, but the Richmonds didn't spoil it). The accompanying instruments — piano, bass and cello — were very good, and their dialogue was coherent and pleasing. "It's surprising how much you can hear in the background," said Gerard, "like for instance the piano solo when she hums softly along with it."

We ended with Victor Feldman's *Secret of the Andes*, figuring it might have trouble with a couple of those exotic drums that make up the introduction. If a cabinet is poorly put together, this recording will spotlight it. The Richmond wasn't quite perfect on this test,

Summing it up…

Brand/model: Castle Richmond 3i
Price: C$799
Size (HWD): 33 x 17 x 23 cm
Sensitivity: 88.5 dB
Impedance (claimed): 8 ohms
Most liked: Beautifully made, great energy and clarity
Least liked: Very limited depth
Verdict: The Energizer bunny in speaker form



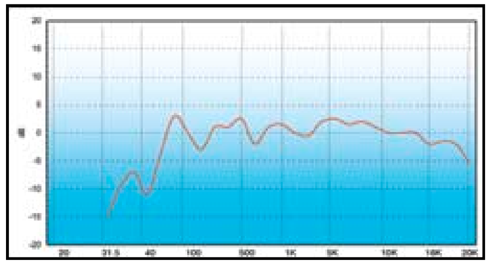
getting the tone wrong on a couple of the really large drums. But because the bass response is necessarily limited, the problem wasn't more than detectable. Much more noticeable was the furious rhythm and the energy. That odd scraped gourd in the introduction came on with power, and so did the whistle. The kick drum, which some speakers simply ignore (perhaps fortunately), was surprisingly good. So was Feldman's piano.

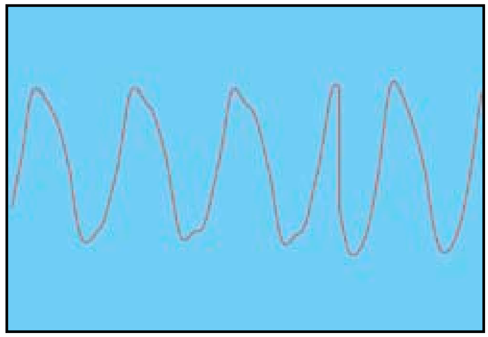
We were curious to see how the Castle Richmonds would do on our usual battery of technical tests. We began by drawing its impedance curve, which is shown in the graph above. Despite the claim of an 8 ohm impedance, the curve actually gets rather closer to 4 ohms over an important part of the range, and considerably *below* 4 ohms at high frequency.

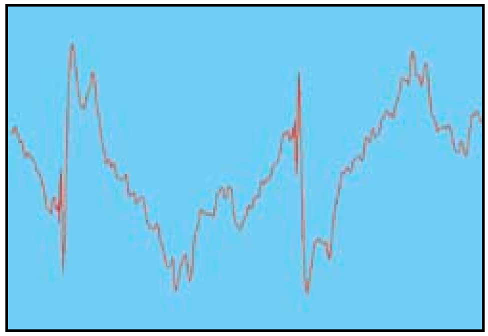
We set up our precision calibrated microphone 1 m in front of the Richmond, but weren't certain how we should orient it. We usually position it on axis with the tweeter, but the inverted configuration of the speaker places the tweeter rather low. We finally put it at woofer height, but slanted down so that it pointed toward the tweeter. The resulting frequency response curve (top right), is very good, especially through the upper midrange and the top end, The waviness in the lower part of the band is, as usual, due to room modes. Of course there's not much in the way of very low bass. Clean response mostly ends at 50 Hz, and even then the waveform (second image at right) isn't really clean. Below that you'll hear sound, but not the fundamental tone.

The 100 Hz square wave (bottom right) is quite good, with barely a glitch on the riser, and a funny little lateral wave almost certainly caused by distortion in the bass. But then we *do* test at high levels: 100 dB reference level at that 1 m distance.

By the usual high end standards, these are low-cost speakers. They probably won't be the cheapest in the store, however, and people not used to high end gear may find their gaze wandering over to speakers half the price and triple the size. But you're buying music, not scrap iron. For a price most people can either pay or save up for in a reasonable time, they'll amply justify buying something other than a mini system.







Too bad they're not available in fivepacks. We were thinking that you could add a subwoofer and you'd have a home theatre system that would make your home-theatre-in-a-box neighbors green with envy.

CROSSTALK

In an ideal hi-fi world speakers would *all* be affordable and equally suited to reproducing all types of music effortlessly. In the real world, many speakers strain with the task of handling the weight of complex music. This one was no exception.

Choosing a pair of speakers is often a sum of compromises, and, in this case you'd best limit your music listening to smaller groups, with or without voices. You'll actually be happily surprised, as I was, with these speakers' ability to deliver a clearly-defined image, and the solid, palpable presence of each performer.

—Albert Simon

This is a *much* smaller speaker than any Castle we had ever tested, but its considerable virtues make it a worthy member of a distinguished family.

No *of course* it can't play a full orchestra at realistic volume. *Of course* it can't reproduce kettle drums and plucked basses realistically. But what it *can* handle it handles with aplomb. It has none of the grey opaque sound of too many inexpensive speakers. It plays music, for real.

I was bemused by the quality touches Castle has provided even at this price. The terrific wood finish for one. The curved grille (best left off, as usual) for another. And have you noticed that they went to the expense of making right-left mirror image speakers?

This is a class act all the way.

—Gerard Rejskind

Despite their modest price these little speakers can give their owners a lot of pleasure. Find a volume level they're comfortable with, and you can start to discover their numerous assets. I'm talking about image, depth and width, all of which are perfectly acceptable. If the bottom end could use a little more weight, the midrange is very good and gives the music considerable richness. The sensitivity of the musicians, heard through these speakers, is contagious.

Add to that a multitude of details, good inflection, lyrics you can always follow. These qualities make you forget, or at least forgive, an occasional hardening here and there, and perhaps a bit of drag on certain rhythms.

On the æsthetic side, you can hardly help noticing the refined wood finish that invites you to touch them, to appreciate their satin smoothness. These cabinets were made by artists, not mere laborers.

—Reine Lessard

Headphone Amplifiers



Got an amplifier? Got headphones? Now how do you plug the second into the first?

Headphones have long been an alternative listening method for those whose partners don't share their musical tastes. Or those with thin walls. In recent years the idea of listening to music through headphones rather than loudspeakers has gone mainstream. The reason for that can be summed up in a word: iPod. (Then again, there's the word Walkman. Remember that? Neither do we.) But no portable player can do justice to great headphones.

Neither can your high end amplifier, chances are. Because headphones are sensitive and go right against your ears, they'll let you hear hiss and hum normally inaudible. And you can't rig up a switching system without doing major damage to audio performance you've spent good money for.

An amplifier made specially for headphones may be the solution. Run it from your regular amp or preamp's Tape Out jacks, and you're set. We reviewed three possibilities.

But first, let's talk about a new headphone, the one below.

The Goldring DR150 headphone

It's from a surprising company, but then Goldring seems to offer all kinds of things these days, even turntables. The DR150 phones are the most expensive of three models at C$260. This is of course much more than the phones on the racks of iPod stores.

They're dynamic phones, with a titanium film diaphragm, comfortable circumaural muffs and open backs. They don't block much sound, and consequently you won't want to listen to them next to someone trying to get some sleep, because they leak like the Titanic. The good side is that if the phone rings while you're listening, you'll hear it.



If you don't see a cord in our picture it's because it's detachable. The 3 metre cord in fact has a gold-plated miniplug at each end, with a full-sized phone plug adapter. All three of us rated them comfortable, thanks to their lightness and the design of the muffs.

Do we have a reference headphone for comparison? Yes we do, though we seldom list it. It's a Koss PRO/4AAA, purchased many years ago for studio monitoring (anyone recall that our Alpha room was originally a broadcast production studio?). It was excellent then, and it still is. We ran a single recording, Margie Gibson's *The Best Thing For You* from her *Say It With Music* album (Sheffield CD-36), first through the Koss phones, then through the Goldring. Each panelist (listening separately for once) would evaluate the Goldring, and then continue the amplifier evaluation with the phone of his or her choice. The choice, however, would have to be made on the basis of the sound, not comfort.

Did the Goldring sound neutral? Not really. Albert found it colored, with an alteration not only of Gibson's voice but also of the piano, bass and percussion. We did note some strong points. The transients are quick and lifelike, the dynamics impressive, and Gerard thought the somewhat leaner bass might actually be a plus. But we didn't enjoy the increased graininess of the highs, nor the somewhat claustrophobic space. All three of us opted to do the rest of the test with our Koss reference phone.

The Goldring, we should add, seemed sensitive to the quality of the amplifier. It sounded best with the CEC amp (but of course so did the Koss). Plugged into an iPod, it was harsh and edgy.

Then on to the comparisons of the amplifiers. We usually listen to our reference system first, and then drop in whatever component we are reviewing and listen again. However we have no reference headphone amplifier, and that

complicated things.

Here's how we solved the problem. The source we selected for these tests was a combination of our CEC TL51X belt-driven transport and the Benchmark DAC1 converter reviewed in our last issue. We did that because the Benchmark's headphone section was one of the products to be reviewed, and that way we could keep the source constant.

We listened first to three recordings through the DAC1, but kept our conclusions for later, since we had as yet nothing to compare it to. We then listened to the same three recordings through the Lehmann and CEC amplifiers, and *then* returned to the Benchmark. So let us begin with the end, as it were.

Benchmark DAC1

If the name is familiar it's because we reviewed this digital-to-analog converter from a little-known company in our last issue. It's not expensive as high end DACs go, at US$975, and fortunately it really *is* high end. Benchmark Media, which produces the unit, sells directly where it has no local dealers.

But there's more to the DAC1 than its obvious function. Notice the volume control on the front panel? It can be disabled, and we had disabled it in our original session. Now notice the two headphone jacks? Yes, the DAC1 is also a headphone amplifier, a function which, you might say, is thrown in for free…as if the DAC1 weren't enough of a bargain in the first place!

Because we know that the DAC1, plus our CEC TL51X transport, is a highly credible source, we used that combination for the listening sessions. That way the source would always be the same. We would listen to the Benchmark itself first, and return to it last for a final comparison (since we have no reference headphone amp). To try the other two amplifiers, we would disable the DAC1's volume control (by flicking a switch on the rear panel), and run a pair of our reference interconnect cables from the DAC1 output to the input of the test amplifier.

We began the session with the Margie Gibson song we had used in the headphone evaluation. It really did sound…

Oh well…back to Latin!

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Summing it up…

Brand/model: Benchmark DAC1
Price: US$975
Size (WDH): 20.5 x 21 x 4.5 cm
Most liked: Volore dipit dit wis num aliquis dolore
Least liked: Ut nisl dolorer iusciduipsum
Verdict: Dolor suscipit volore molorper sed mod tat

Lehmann Black Cube Linear

This headphone amp is from the same German company that makes the phono preamp of nearly the same name. It is, as you will have observed, neither black nor a cube, but oh well. The power supply is built in, and so it has a standard IEC cord. The two sets of phono jacks (the second set is an output, so that the Lehmann can actually be used as a simple preamp) are reasonable, and were a tight fit with our reference interconnects.

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The CEC HD53-R

If the Lehmann amplifier had seemed expensive, what to think of this one? In fact it is only a little more expensive than the Lehmann, and that would be fine…if its performance turned out to be substantially superior.

And the CEC is rather more versatile than most headphone amps. On its picture on page 42, you can make out the output binding posts at the rear. Why would a headphone amp need binding posts? It's because this is also an amplifier of not insubstantial power (10 watts into 4 ohms according to the specs, which we didn't confirm), and it is actually possible to connect speakers to it. More on this shortly.

This is an all-in-one amp, with the power supply in the quite heavy aluminum case, and with the usual IEC plug for the cord of your choice. The phono input jacks are — as on the CEC integrated amplifier reviewed in our last issue — not inspiring. On the other hand there are also XLR balanced jacks if you have the appropriate source.

A small rear panel switch adjusts the amplifier's gain so that you can have a good range of volume. In our setup (we were, you'll recall, running it from the output of the Benchmark converter) we needed to select the +6 dB position in order to avoid running the volume control nearly all the way up. We could hear a bit of hiss with that setting, but it was so slight that it was inaudible with even the softest musical passage.

But the front panel is where the interesting stuff lies. There are two volume controls, and at first we thought they controlled the left and right channels respectively. Not so. The HD53 actually has two independent headphone amplifier sections. It's perfect for couples. Each of you gets a headphone jack (actually *two* headphone jacks, one for a full-sized phone plug and the other for a miniplug), and an independent volume control. Compare that to what you get with most headphone amplifiers, and it's clear that you're getting something extra for your money.

At least if the performance is adequate, you are.

We began with Margie Gibson's song *The Best Thing For You*, and we were pretty sure we had a winner. Gibson's voice was clearer than with either of the other two amplifiers, but without even a hint of strain. Her "S" sounds were

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Coming up in issue No. 77 of

UHF ULTRA HIGH FIDELITY MAGAZINE

The Bryston 2B-SST amplifier...does it measure up to the legendary 2BLP?
The Simaudio Moon P-8 preamp...is it in the league of the W-8 power amp?
The Harmonix DAC...can you get $15,000 sound for a third the price?
Can you make your own high resolution recordings at home?



natural, proving once again that the sibilant artifacts we often hear are the result of problems in the playback, not the original recording.

But it's not even the voice that strikes you first. Rather it's the perfect balance of voice, piano, cello, bass and percussion. We all asked for a second listen, and then we noticed the other virtues: a drum kit that was clearer and much more natural, and details of diction we are not used to hearing quite so clearly. Gibson's *presence* was notable too.

We continued with Eric Bibbs' Gospel Blues piece, *Needed Time*. It opens with a soft and subtle duet between Bibbs' own guitar and Göran Wennerbrandt's bottleneck, and it was well night on perfect. The balance between the actual sound of the guitar strings and the resonance of the instrument bodies was just right.

As for Bibbs' voice, it was pretty well nailed by the CEC as well. It was very clear, putting the lyrics in evidence, full of life and expression, but without at any point overemphasizing any aspect of it. "He's just *there*," said Albert, "and there's a lot of space all around him."

We ended with the Stölzel piece sung by Karina Gauvin, and once again we were delighted. She sang with lots of power, and indeed we all reached for the volume knob to turn her down a little, though only because this CD is recorded louder than most. Gauvin's voice remained smooth and effortless even when she rose in both pitch and volume. The harpsichord was clear, but a little way back, as it should be. Albert, it must be said, thought this recording sounded superb with all three amplifiers.

With the session over, we hooked up our Living Voice speakers to the output binding posts. They're the same horrible posts as on the CEC integrated amp, unfortunately. The sound was clear, without artifacts that made us cringe, but we would consider this a stopgap bonus, not something you would plan on using for the rest of your life.

Summing it up...

Brand/model: CEC HD53-R
Price: C$990/US$790
Size (WDH): 22 x 26 x 6 cm
Most liked: Fine performance, two independent sections
Least liked: Crapola output binding posts
Verdict: Worthy of the best phones you can afford

CROSSTALK

The clear winner here, I think, is...

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Back Issues

THE ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION: Issues No.7-19 (except 11, 15, 17 and 18, out of print): nine issues available for the price of five (see below). A piece of audio history. Available separately at the regular price.

No.75: *Amplifiers:* The new Simaudio Moon W-8 flagship, and integrated amps from Copland (the CTA-405) and CEC. *Speakers:* the Reference 3a Veena and the Energy Reference Connoisseur reborn. *Plus* the Benchmark DAC converter. *And also:* Bergman on the changing concept of hi-fi and stereo, a chat with FIM's Winston Ma, and the rediscovery of a great Baroque composer, Christoph Graupner.

No.74: *Lots of amplifiers:* The Mimetism 15.2, Qinpu A-8000, Raysonic SP-100, Cyrus 8vs and Rogue Stereo 90. *More reviews*: Atlantis Argentera speaker, Cyrus CD8X player, GutWire MaxCon Squared line filter, Harmonic remote, Music Studio 10 recording software. *Cables:* Atlas, Stager, BIS and DNM, including a look at how length affects digital cables. *Plus:* the (high fidelity) digital jukebox, why HDTV doesn't always mean what you think, and Reine Lessard on *The Man Who Invented Rock'n'Roll.*

No.73: *Integrated amplifiers:* The superlative Audiomat Récital and the affordable but musical Exposure 2010S. *Analog:* Turntables from Roksan (the Radius 5) and Goldring (the Rega-designed GR2), plus two cartridges, and four phono stages from CEC, Marchand and Goldring. *More reviews:* The Harmonix Reimyo CD player, the Audiomat Maestro DAC, the ASW Genius 400 speakers, and the Sonneteer BardOne wireless system. *Plus:* Paul Bergman on the making of an LP and why they don't all sound the same, the many ways of compressing video so it looks (almost) like film, news from Montreal 2005, and the story of the accordion.

No.72: *Music from data:* We look at ways you can make your own audiophile CDs with equipment you already have, and we test a DAC that yields hi-fi from your computer. We review the new Audio Reference speakers, the updated Connoisseur single-ended tube amp, upscale Actinote cables, and Gershman's Acoustic Art panels. How to tune up your system for an inexpensive performance boost. And much more.

No.71: Three small speaker: Reference 3a Dulcet, Totem Rainmaker, and a very low cost but surprising speaker from France. We do a complex blind cable test: five cables from Atlas, and one Wireworld cable with different connectors (Eichmann, WBT nextgen, and Wireworld). The McCormack UDP-1 universal player, muRata super tweeters, the Simaudio I-3 amp and Equinox CD player. Paul Bergman reveals the philosophical differences behind two-channel stereo and multichannel.

No.70: How SACD won the war…or how DVD-A blew it. Reviews: Linn Unidisk 1.1 universal player and Shanling SCD-T200 player. Speakers: Reference 3a Royal Virtuoso, Equation 25, Wilson Benesch Curve, preview of muRata super tweeters. Other reviews: Simaudio W-5LE amp, the iPod as an audiophile source. Plus: future video screens, the eternal music of George Gershwin, and two reports from Montréal 2004.

No.69: Tube Electronics: Audiomat Opéra , Connoisseur SE-2 and Copland CSA29 integrated amps, and Shanling SP-80 monoblocks. Also: Audiomat's Phono-1.5, Creek CD50, as well as a great new remote control, GutWire's NotePad antivibration device, and a music-related computer game that had us laughing out loud. Paul Bergman on the return of the vacuum tube, and how music critics did their best to kill the world's greatest music.

No.68: Loudspeakers: Thiel CS2.4, Focus Audio FS688, Iliad B1. Electronics:Vecteur I-6.2 and Audiomat Arpège integrated amplifiers, Copland 306 multichannel tube preamp, Rega Fono MC. Also: Audio Note and Copland CD players, GutWire MaxCon power filter. And there's more: all about power supplies, what's coming beyond DVD, and a chat with YBA's Yves-Bernard André.

No.67: Loudspeakers: A new, improved Reference 3a MM de Capo, and the awesome Living Voice Avatar OBX-R. Centre speakers for surround from Castle, JMLab, ProAc, Thiel, Totem and Vandersteen. One of them joins our Kappa system. Two multichannel amps from Copland and Vecteur. Plus: plans for a DIY platform for placing a centre speaker atop any TV set, Paul Bergman on the elements of acoustics, and women in country music.

No.66: Reviews: the Jadis DA-30 amplifier, the Copland 305 tube preamp and 520 solid state amp. Plus: the amazing Shanling CD player, Castle Stirling speakers, and a remote control that tells you what to watch. Also: Bergman on biwiring and biamplification, singer Janis Ian's alternative take on music downloading, and a chat with Opus 3's Jan-Eric Persson.

No.65: Back to Vinyl: setting up an analog system, reviews of Rega P9 turntable, and phono preamps from Rega, Musical Fidelity and Lehmann. The Kappa reference system for home theatre: how we selected our HDTV monitor, plus a review of the Moon Stellar DVD player. Antivibration: Atacama, Symposium, Golden Sound, Solid-Tech, Audioprism, Tenderfeet. Plus an interview with Rega's turntable designer, and a look back at what UHF was like 20 years ago.

No.64: Speakers: Totem M1 Signature and Hawk, Visonik E352. YBA Passion Intégré amp, Cambridge IsoMagic (followup), better batteries for audio-to-go. Plus: the truth about upsampling, an improvement to our LP cleaning machine, an interview with Ray Kimber.

No.63: Tube amps: ASL Leyla & Passion A11. Vecteur Espace speakers, 2 interconnects (Harmonic Technology Eichmann), 5 speaker cables (Pierre Gabriel, vdH , Harmonic Technology, Eichmann), 4 power cords (Wireworld, Harmonic Technology, Eichmann, ESP). Plus: Paul Bergman on soundproofing, how to compare components in the store, big-screen TV's to stay away from, a look back at the Beatles revolution.

No.62: Amplifiers: Vecteur I-4, Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista M3, Antique Sound Lab MG-S11DT. Passive preamps from Creek and Antique Sound Lab. Vecteur L-4 CD player. Interconnects: VdH Integration and Wireworld Soltice. Plus: the right to copy music, and how it may be vanishing. Choosing a DVD player by features. And all about music for the movies.

No.61: Digital: Audiomat Tempo and Cambridge Isomagic DACs, Vecteur D-2 transport. Speakers: Osborn Mini Tower and Mirage OM-9. Soundcare Superspikes. And: new surround formats, dezoning DVD players.

No.60: Speakers: Monitor Audio Silver 9, Reference 3a MM De Capo, Klipsch RB-5, Coincident Triumph Signature. Plus: a Mirage subwoofer and the Audiomat Solfège amp. Paul Bergman on reproducing extreme lows.

No.59: CD players: Moon Eclipse, Linn Ikemi and Genki, Rega Jupiter/Io, Cambridge D500. Plus: Oskar Kithara speaker, with Heil tweeter. And: transferring LP to CD, the truth on digital radio, digital cinema vs MaxiVision 48.

No.58: Amplifiers: ASL AQ1003, Passion I10 & I11, Rogue 88, Jadis Orchestra Reference, Linar 250. Headphone amps: Creek, Antique Sound Lab, NVA, Audio Valve. Plus: Foundation Research LC-2 line filter, Gutwire power cord, Pierre Gabriel ML-1 2000 cable. And: building your own machine to clean LP's.

No.57: Speakers: Dynaudio Contour 1.3, Gershman X-1/SW-1, Coincident Super Triumph Signature, Castle Inversion 15, Oskar Aulos. PLUS: KR 18 tube amp. Music Revolution: the next 5 years. Give your Hi-Fi a Fall Tune-Up.

No.56: Integrated amps: Simaudio I-5, Roksan Caspian, Myryad MI120, Vecteur Club 10, NVA AP10 Also: Cambridge T500 tuner, Totem Forest. Phono stages: Creek, Lehmann, Audiomat. Interconnects: Actinote, Van den Hul, Pierre Gabriel. Plus: Paul Bergman on power and current…why you need both

No.55: CD players: Linn CD12, Copland CDA-289, Roksan Caspian, AMC CD8a. Other reviews: Enigma Oremus speaker, Magenta ADE-24 black box. Plus: the DSD challenge for the next audio disc, pirate music on the Net, the explosion of off-air video choices.

No.54: Electronics: Creek A52se, Simaudio W-3 and W-5 amps. Copland CSA-303, Sima P-400 and F.T. Audio preamps (the latter two passive). Musical Fidelity X-DAC revisited, Ergo AMT phones, 4 line filters, 2 interconnects. Plus: Making your own CD's.

No.53: Loudspeakers:Reference 3a Intégrale, Energy Veritas v2.8, Epos ES30, Totem Shaman, Mirage 390is, Castle Eden. Plus: Paul Bergman on understanding biamping, biwiring, balanced lines, and more.

No.52: CD players: Alchemist Nexus, Cambridge CD6, YBA Intégré, Musical Fidelity X-DAC, Assemblage DAC-2. Subwoofers: Energy ES-8 and NHT PS-8. Plus: Paul Bergman on reproducing deep bass, Vegas report, and the story behind digital television.

No.51: Integrated amps: YBA Intégré DT, Alchemist Forseti, Primare A-20, NVA AP50 Cambridge A1. CD players: Adcom GCD-750, Rega Planet. An economy system to recommend to friends, ATI 1505 5-channel amp, Bergman on impedance, why connectors matter, making your own power bars.

No.50: CD: Cambridge DiscMagic/DACMagic, Primare D-20, Dynaco CDV Pro. Analog: Rega Planar 9, Linn LP12 after 25 years. Also: Moon preamp, Linn Linto phono stage, Ergo and Grado headphones. Speaker cables: Linn K-400, Sheffield, MIT 750 Also: 15 years of UHF.

No.49: Power amps: Simaudio Moon, Bryston 3B ST, N.E.W. DCA-33, plus the Alchemist Forseti amp and preamp, and McCormack Micro components. Also: our new Reference 3a Suprema II reference speakers, and a followup on the Copland 277 CD player. Plus: how HDCD really works.

No.48: Loudspeakers: JMLabs Daline 3.1, Vandersteen 3a, Totem Tabù, Royd Minstrel. CD: Cambridge CD4, Copland CDA-277. Also: An interview with the founder of a Canadian audiophile record label.

No.47: FM tuners: Magnum Dynalab MD-108, Audiolab 8000T, Fanfare FT-1. Speaker cables: QED Qudos, Wireworld Equinox and Eclipse, MIT MH-750. Parasound C/BD-2000 transport and D/AC-2000 converter. And: Upgrading your system for next to nothing.

No.46: Electronics: Simaudio 4070SE amp & P-4002 preamp, Copland CTA-301 & CTA-505, N.E.W. P-3 preamp. Digital cables: Wireworld, Audiostream, MIT, XLO, Audioprism, and Wireworld's box for comparing interconnects. Also: YBA CD-1 and Spécial CD players. Yves-Bernard André talks about about his blue diode CD improvement.

No.45: Integrated amps: Copland CTA-401, Simaudio 4070i, Sugden Optima 140. CD: Adcom GDA-700 HDCD DAC, Sonic Frontiers SFD-1 MkII. Interconnects: Straight Wire Maestro, 3 versions of Wireworld Equinox. Plus: Yamamura Q15 CD oil, and "Hi-Fi for the Financially Challenged".

No.44: Digital: Rotel RCD970BX, Counterpoint DA-10A DAC. Speakers: Apogee Ribbon Monitor, Totem Mite, more on the Gershman Avant Garde. Also: Laser-Link cable, "The Solution" CD treatment, AudioQuest sorbothane feet, Tenderfeet, Isobearings. Plus: Inside Subwoofers, and the castrati, the singers who gave their all for music.

No.43: The first HDCD converter: the EAD DSP-1000 MkII. Speakers: Gershman Avant Garde, Totem Mani-2 and Rokk, Quad ESL-63 with Gradient sub. Plus: Keith O. Johnson on the road to HDCD, and our editor joins those of other magazines to discuss what's hot in audio.

No.42: Electronics: Spectral DMC-12 and Celeste P-4001 preamplifiers, amps and preamps from Duson. Also: Sonic Frontiers SFD-1 converter, power line filters from Audioprism, Chang, and YBA. Plus: Inside the preamplifier, and how the tango became the first "dirty" dance.

No.41: Digital: Roksan DA-2, EAD DSP-7000, McCormack DAC-1, QED Ref. Digit. Cables: Straight Wire LSI Encore & Virtuoso, Wireworld Equinox, van den Hul The 2nd & Revelation, Cardas Cross & Hexlink Golden, Transparent Music-Link Super & Music-Wave Super. Plus: Bergman on recording stereo.

No.40: Integrated amps: YBA Intégré, Rotel 960, Sugden A-25B, Sima PW-3000, Linn Majik, Naim NAIT 3, AMC CVT3030, Duson PA-75. Stereo: what it is, how it works, why it's disappearing from records.

No. 39: Speakers: KEF Q50, Martin-Logan Aerius, Castle Howard, NEAR 40M, Klipsch Kg4.2. Plus: QED passive preamps, followup on the Linn Mimik CD player.

No. 38: CD players: Roksan Attessa, Naim CDS, Linn Mimik, Quad 67, Rotel 945, Micromega Model "T". Plus: How the record industry will wipe out hi-fi, and why women have been erased from music history.

No.37: Electronics: Celeste 4070 and McIntosh 7150 amps, Linn Kairn and Klout. Plus: RoomTunes acoustic treatment, why all amps don't sound alike, and the truth about Pro Logic.

No.36: *SOLD OUT*

No.35: Speakers: Castle Chester, Mirage M-7si, Totem Model 1, Tannoy 6.1, NHT 2.3, 3a Micro Monitor, Rogers LS2a/2. Plus: Tests of high end video recorders, hi-fi stereo recordings of piano performances of 75 years ago. Acoustics part 6: Conceiving the room.

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High end Sound From Your Computer?

In *UHF* No. 75 we explained how to use Apple's iTunes program (free for Windows and Mac OS X) to get instant access to a vast music library. What was not evident was how to listen without taking a huge performance hit. A very few computers have digital outputs, usually optical. But your computer and your music system are probably not adjacent. How do you get a pristine digital signal from here to there?

The most tempting way would be to somehow get it out of an iPod. Unlike most portable players, the iPod can carry music around in either uncompressed mode or lossless compression (more on that in a moment), or no compression at all. And the larger iPods, like the official *UHF* iPod on the next page, have the capacity for it. At first we thought it would be a piece of cake to get the digital signal from the iPod and into an audiophile-grade converter. Wrong. Converters expect to see digital data in S/PDIF (Sony/Philips Digital Interface Format), and that's not what the iPod supplies. Nonetheless we believe it can be done, and we are pursuing our research.

So how *do* you get a good digital signal over to your stereo system?

There are several ways, though we think the little machine shown above is the best we've seen: the Squeezebox 3, from Slim Devices. This device is so well thought out and does so much, that it is difficult to believe it can be sold at such a low price (US$299). Before we actually get into setting it up, let's look at what it is and what it does.

The Squeezebox is a music controller for your computer, except that it doesn't have to be connected physically to your computer. If you have a wireless (Wi-Fi) home network, as more and more computer users do, it hooks on to that. It can also connect by Ethernet, and indeed there is an Ethernet-only version available for $50 less. If you use a jukebox program such as iTunes, the Squeezebox can control it too. That means you can use its remote to select any piece of music that is in iTunes and call it up. If you don't use iTunes (as you can't if your computer runs Linux or Unix), Slim Devices' own software lets you do much the same. The bright, large fluorescent display shows you what's on.

The rear of the device has a plethora of connectors. You can plug in headphones, or interconnects to your amplifier (there is a built-in Burr-Brown DAC), or you can use a coaxial or TOSLINK digital cable to put the digital signal right into your own DAC, or into your one-box player's digital input. Enough for you?

Meet digital audio's missing link, the Squeezebox

But wait, as they say on late-night TV infomercials, *there's more!* You can set up *several* Squeezeboxes, and they can be playing different selections at the same time, at least if your network has enough bandwidth. If you get tired of the music you own, you can also listen to Internet radio, and you can set up the screen to scroll through news headlines, stock prices, or weather forecasts.

We do actually have a large collection of music on a hard disc, which is there to feed our iPod (see *The [High Fidelity] Digital Jukebox* in *UHF* No. 74). Nearly all of it was compressed in Apple Lossless, which as its name suggests can compress music without doing irreversible damage. The Squeezebox also handles the free lossless codec FLAC, plus AAC, MP3, WMA (on Windows), and lots more. What it can't do is stream protected music, such as that from Apple's iTunes store. Compressed music from current stores is of little interest to serious music listeners, however, and we don't consider that a dealbreaker.

Setting up the Squeezebox to connect to our network was aided by clear on-screen instructions. Once connected it "saw" our massive iTunes collection and gave us full access to it. From the operational point of view, the Squeezebox is a wonder, marred only by a serious security problem, which we will get to shortly.

But we are audiophiles, and what we really wanted to find out was whether what the Squeezebox provides is something we would want to listen to. We set it up in our Alpha system, with its digital output (we tried both coaxial and optical) feeding our Counterpoint DA-10A converter. Our first observation: HDCD-encoded recordings stored with Apple Lossless compression maintain their encoding. That much was interesting, and since the code is found in the dithering, it also means that very low-level digital information is preserved through encoding, decoding and transmission.

The proof of the pudding

A lot of our favorite test recordings are already on hard disc, and that made comparisons easy. We selected some CDs

we know well, and listened to them on our two-box player: a CEC belt-driven transport and our Counterpoint DAC. We then connected the Squeezebox to the DAC using the same coaxial digital cable (an Atlas Opus, in a 1.5 m length). Listening was done through our Alpha system, two floors above the location of the Macintosh G5 that holds the music collection.



We began with an old favorite, *Now the Green Blade Riseth* (Proprius PRCD9093). As we have noted countless times, this beautifully-recorded choral disc can embarass the designers of some surprisingly expensive systems.

This article could turn out to be be one of the most important we have ever published, and we can pretty much guarantee that it is different from supposedly similar reviews, mostly uncritical, found in other publications. We think you'll want to get the full version.

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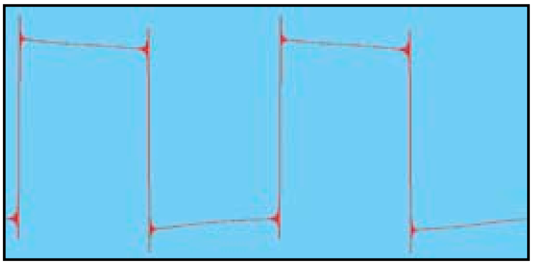
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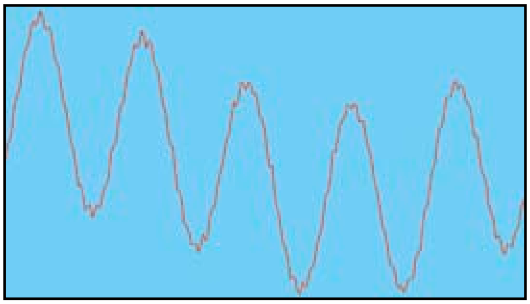
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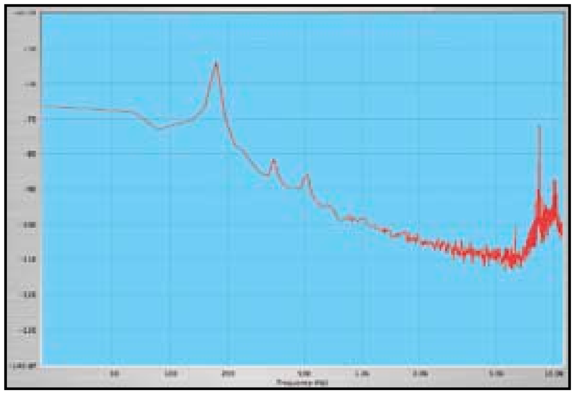
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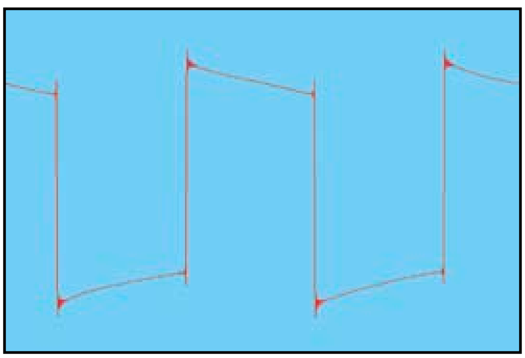


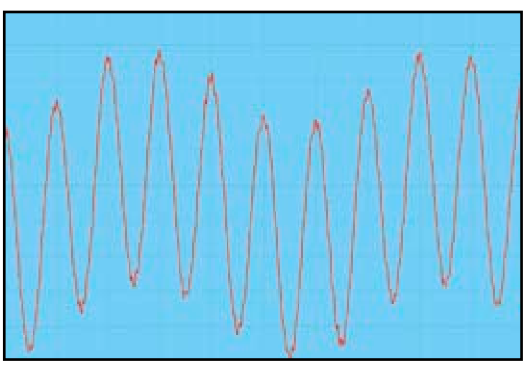


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What about HDCD?

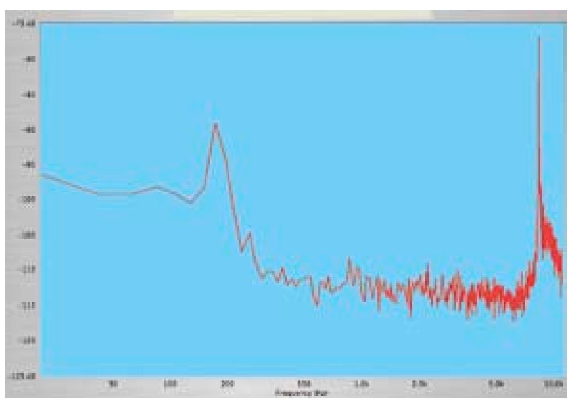
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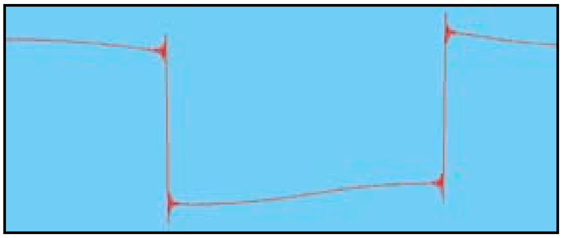
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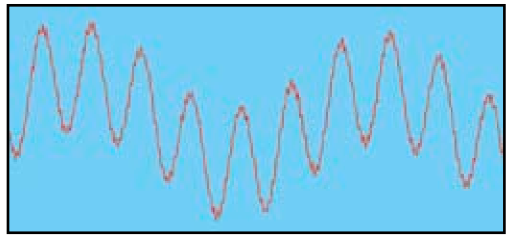
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"Lossless" compression?

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The dark side of the Squeezebox

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Summing it up...

Brand/model: Squeezebox 3
Price: US$299
Dimensions (WHD): 19 x 9 x 7,7 cm
Most liked: Well thought out, good performance, huge potential
Least liked: Serious security hole (see text)
Verdict: Stop the presses: music on a computer is not the devil's spawn

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Alternatives

The cheapest we know of is from Apple. The Airport Express looks like the little power supply that comes with Apple laptops, and contains a Wi-Fi transmitter that will hook up to your local network, or directly to your computer if it has a Wi-Fi card.



Since it has no display, you configure it from your computer. You can then get analog audio from it via a mini phone plug, or you can get digital audio into your own DAC with an optical cable. It plays what the computer sends it, since it has no controls of its own. The box has an Ethernet connector for printer sharing or setting up an ad hoc network. It costs US$129, or C$159.

The Roku Soundbridge M1000 has a feature set closer to that of the Squeezebox, and costs $100 less. The M500, with a smaller, nearly unreadable, display is even cheaper. It won't run Apple Lossless tracks unless (ironically) you download Slim Devices' software. The picture shows an "M2000," which appears to be vaporware.



We attempted to get a Soundbridge for review, without success. Roku's listed Canadian distributor shows startlingly high prices, and e-mails to its site bounce back. Roku told us it would "look into it," but that was nearly a year ago. In the meantime we have had a reader report that the Soundbridge's optical output is poor. Since Roku will not or cannot supply a unit for review, we pretty much have to leave it at that.

Conclusions

We have no plans to sell our rather expensive CD (and SACD) players and shove everything into the computer. Nor will we stop reviewing (and recommending) standalone music sources, both digital and analog. It is, however, possible to get real high fidelity from a computer if you know what you're doing.

And it's probable that better devices yet (the Squeezebox 4, perhaps) will yield even higher fidelity. It's important to understand that the digital signal from your original CD remains digital right through the entire process, and finally enters the analog domain only at your stereo system. The acrobatics that your computer, your Wi-Fi router and the Squeezebox put it through are as nothing compared to the manipulations that go into the actual manufacture of the Compact Disc itself. Even so, there's a better than even chance that the disc was mastered on a computer not unlike the one you own.

We've been told, by the way, that we can obtain much better sound from the Squeezebox by replacing the tiny power brick that comes with it. Expect us to take the hint.

CROSSTALK

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Power On the Go

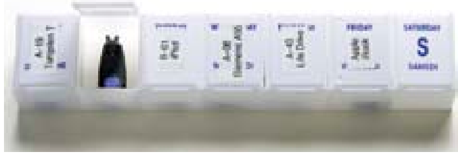
It struck us when we were packing up to go to Vegas for CES and T.H.E.Show: each year we need more and more chargers to go anywhere.

Not all of our chargers are related to audio, to be sure, though some of them are. Two of us went along to cover the shows (see *Vegas 2006* in *UHF* No. 75), and we actually brought along no fewer than seven chargers! Count ’em: an iPod, a Palm Life Drive (which is a video players among other things), a Palm Tungsten T, an Apple iBook, a Pentax Optio digital camera, and two telephones (Siemens and Motorola). We wondered what all those boxes and wires would look like on an airport X-ray screen!

Which is why the iGo Everywhere Dual Power 130, shown above, grabbed our attention. It promised to replace all of our chargers except the one for the camera (the Optio battery unfortunately, can’t be recharged in the camera). It comes in two parts. The larger box can charge laptop computers. The smaller add-on box, which is an option but is included in the package we got, can charge the iPod, phones and other small products. Your main problem will be rounding up the adapters for everything you own, but with the company’s help we got ’em all, even the one for a Motorola P280 phone, which took a little longer.

There’s one down side: the iGo can recharge all six devices, but not all at once. On the plus side, you can travel worldwide with it, because it adjusts itself to whatever voltage is in the wall.

Each device of course requires its own adapter tips, and in our case that meant six adapters. The vinyl iGo carrying pouch has a pocket for adapters, but good luck figuring out that “A20” is what you need for a Motorola phone. We picked up one of those dollar store giant pill boxes, with seven compartments for the days of the week, and relabelled them.



Do you need one?

Not everyone travels with as many devices as we do. Six chargers is a lot, whereas three or four may be a bearable number.

And how many power chargers do <u>you</u> travel with?

And six devices may not mean six chargers. If one of the devices you carry is a laptop computer (you’re unlikely to buy the iGo otherwise), it’s possible that other devices can be recharged by simply plugging them into the laptop’s USB connector. That’s true of the iPod, and it’s also true of the Palm Tungsten handheld (though not of the Life Drive). Indeed, the Palm and iPod travel chargers are substantially identical: plug-in cubes with USB jacks.

And the iGo Everywhere may not make your luggage lighter. We weighed all six chargers we wanted to replace and came up with a total of 762 grams. The weight of the iGo with its cords, except the optional car cord? It was 738 g, and that didn’t include the six adapter tips.

But weight isn’t everything. If we had measured the kilometers of tangled cord on each of our adapters, it would have put the iGo way ahead. What’s more, rounding up our six chargers means getting down on hands and knees to unplug them, and the danger of forgetting a charger for a critical device is very real.

What it costs

As we went to press we didn’t have official list prices, so we relied on iGo’s on-line store (www.igo.com), and in Canada, the catalog for *The Source*. The unit we have seems to sell for US$150/C$190, with adapter tips going for US$10/C$12. Considering the going price for just a charger for a modern laptop, that’s not bad. And street prices may be well below that.

An alternative?

At the same time we saw the iGo, we also looked at an interesting universal charger from a company called MFuel. It’s called the Universal Power Bank, and there was a picture of it in our Vegas report in *UHF* No. 75.

The MFuel device can also charge everything you’ve got, but it can do more. It has its own rechargeable battery, and it can *power* those devices, to give you extra usage far from a power source. We asked for a review sample and got no reply. Since Vegas, its price rose from US$300 to $400.

Our guess, however, is that it weighs a lot more than 738 grams!

FUTURE HIGH-RES DISCS

As we write this (and probably as you *read* this), the format battle for the next silver audio/video disc is still on. Yes, it will affect audio as well as video.

Let's recapitulate.

On one side are Toshiba, NEC, and — perhaps more important — the DVD Forum, the consortium that set the standard for the existing DVD. Their project is HD DVD, the "HD" of course standing for "high definition." It is read with a blue laser, which has a shorter wavelength than the red laser used in existing DVD and CD players. In other respects the disc itself is similar to the existing DVD, and can be produced in existing plants (though presumably with a lower yield of flaw-free discs). The advantages of this DVD-like format are obvious. The discs will be cheaper to produce and the saving can be passed on to consumers (hey, we're just reporting the official line). And the system can be brought to market faster. Target launch: Fall of 2005.

Wait a minute…*2005?*

In fact Toshiba's first HD DVD player, the HD-XA1 (shown at lower right), was launched on March 31, 2006, and only in Japan. Its eventual US price was listed as $799 (the HD-A1, announced earlier, which was supposed to be cheaper, was not mentioned). The price is mostly theoretical, since at launch time there was not a single film available in the format. So much for coming to market faster. It did, however, beat its competitor to market.

The competitor is Blu-Ray, backed by Sony and Matsushita (Panasonic), but not the DVD Forum. The Blu-Ray disc also uses a blue laser, as its name implies, but its structure is different. The polycarbonate layer covering data side of the disc is ten times thinner than that of the DVD, allowing a better view and therefore more data density. Making Blu-Ray discs will require retooling factories, but that is of course only a transitional drawback.



As in a shooting war, the two camps have scrambled to gather allies. Toshiba has powerful partners, such as Microsoft and Intel, and more importantly Hollywood studios: Warner, Universal and Disney. The Blu-Ray camp has the support of Hewlett-Packard, Dell and Apple, as well as Sony Pictures (of course), MGM (which belongs to Sony) and 20th Century Fox.

The first Blu-Ray player was due for launch about now too, and one was shown by Samsung at the Montreal show in late March, but it has been…(surprise!) delayed (to May 23rd, but keep your eyes open for more news). If and when they are released, Blu-Ray players will be about double the price of the Toshiba player. Take those prices with a grain of salt, however, because with no available software neither player will be available for sale in any store.



Movie studio support

On the face of it, having the studios on side is vital, because only they can supply software. But if it's possible for the studios to help, it's just as possible that they can choose to stop the development of tomorrow's discs dead in its tracks.

The industry got badly burned with the DVD, whose CSS encryption was supposed to make copying impossible. Breaking CSS turned out to be trivial, and there are plenty of shareware and even freeware programs for defeating it. Hollywood doesn't want that to happen with a much better resolution disc. Are the anti-copying systems of HD DVD and Blu-Ray done? And will they really be more robust? We believe they are not finalized, and if that is true no usable player can truly be launched.

We might add that it seems unlikely a more robust anti-copy system can resist reverse engineering. That's because anyone who makes a player needs to have the keys. *Someone* is going to forget the key on a store counter somewhere. Lest we forget, that was how CSS first got breached.

Come to think of it, are the studios ready to abandon DVD's zone system, which prevents discs from one part of the world from being played in another? Of course that system was compromised years ago, but is Hollywood ready to go with worldwide release of a single disc? Or is this one more thing that needs to be straightened out before the first player is sold to the public?

Though the studios have chosen sides, no one is interested in making films for a player no one buys…nor in having productions absent from a system that becomes popular. Beyond the posturing, the studios are hedging their bets. They will release films for whichever is the winning system. And the winner will be decided by large store chains, *not* by consumers.

What about audiophiles?

Whichever system wins out, the vast space on the disc might make it possible to make more space for sound.

That could just mean more channels (8.1 channel surround is one of Blu-Ray's options), or it could also mean less compression. Or *no* compression.

But here we're talking about the video disc. Could one of the new formats also be tomorrow's higher fidelity audio discs?

Sony believes it can, and that seems to be the reason for its lapsing interest in its own SACD format. Of course SACD lives on thanks to audiophile labels, but Sony Music has its eye on something else: Direct Stream Digital *on a Blu-Ray disc.*

Sure enough, DSD, the audio format of SACD, is one of Blu-Ray's options. So will the Blu-Ray disc replace SACD, prompting audiophiles (and videophiles) to buy yet another sort of digital player? Not so fast!

Though Blu-Ray looks like the probable winner of the battle because of its larger capacity, the DVD Forum has its own plans. The DVD Forum is, you may recall, the guardian of the other super disc, DVD-Audio. That disc was made possible by Meridian's MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing) compression system. Is MLP one of the standards for HD DVD? Well, duh!

But who needs it?

Film lovers want a disc with the greatest possible capacity, in order to get the best possible picture. However audiophiles would seem to have all they could want already. Either DVD-A or SACD can give you an hour and a quarter of high resolution 5.1 channel surround sound. Who needs a disc with 15 Gb of space? Or 30 Gb? Or more?

We can get a clue by looking at another of the DVD Forum's formats, the Dual-Disc. DVD-A had been done in by its incompatibility with other audio players, so why not (belatedly) bring out a hybrid disc?

SACD had gone to hybrid CD/SACD formats by using a dual-layer disc, and that has become the norm for Super Audio. The DVD Forum has brought out its own hybrid. Think of it as a DVD-A disc and a conventional CD glued back to back. Just put it into the player the right way up, and you're good to go. Unfortunately the thicker Dual-Disc jams in many players, and some manufacturers warn that playing one will void the warranty. Jamming in a car player is all but guaranteed. However a new format won't have that problem.

Not surprisingly, manufacturers mainly don't care about the audiophile world, and for the most part they've used the Dual-Disc format for something else: a CD on one side, and *a video DVD on the other side.* Clearly, the consumer gets more than by downloading the music with BitTorrent or eMule.

There's reason to expect similar products on either Blu-Ray or HD DVD.

By the way, hybrid video/audio discs already exist. Some music DVDs have both Dolby Digital (compressed) surround sound *and* the option of uncompressed PCM sound that is literally CD quality. With the extra space on tomorrow's discs, both picture and sound could potentially make a great leap forward.

Just don't expect to find a player for sale in a real store for a while.



THE TOTEM MAN

The first time we ever met Vince Bruzzese he was showing a prototype of a very small speaker with what seemed at the time like an absurdly high price. We're glad to say that we encouraged him to persevere, and the rest is history: the tiny "overpriced" speaker turned out to be the Totem Model One, arguably the world's most successful mini-monitor.

We talked with him a lot after that, and ran a Rendezvous *feature with him in* UHF *No. 43. We thought it was about time we talked with him again.*

UHF: *When you look back to the beginning, when the Totem line was just one model, does it seem an awfully long time ago?*
Bruzzese: Actually not, because we still live with that same model, but it has been a wonderful journey, and it still is. The joy we got out of the Model One, we get from most of our other models.
UHF: *Has the marketing side gotten easier as the line has grown? It must have been difficult when you had just one model.*
Bruzzese: Without a doubt. It was difficult to penetrate the market back in the late 1980's. Back then the big speaker ruled, and a small speaker was out of the ordinary. Of course the addition of other models made the line extremely acceptable to the mainstream market.
UHF: *The Mani-2 was the speaker we all thought would be called the Model Two. Tell us how you thought about going beyond the Model One.*
Bruzzese: Actually the Mani-2 was brought out almost at the same time as the Rokk and the Tott. Those two were excellent in their own way, but the Mani-2 was supposed to be the flagship "monitor" speaker. Back then monitors had certain limitations, and the Mani-2 was totally different. No one else had tried a vented box with a double woofer inside. I wanted something that would coalesce correctly and would have an extremely low noise floor, with holographic imaging, keeping that same emotional context and pace that I was always interested in.
UHF: *Though it's not obvious from the outside, the design of the Mani-2 is radically different.*
Bruzzese: Yes. There's no written theory on that type of speaker, very few parameters you could follow. Being largely self-taught in the engineering of speakers, I delved into things that had never been approached before, to produce the ultimate monitor. And it has survived the test of time. I think

that, with the right equipment, the Mani-2 remains today one of the most formidable and most communicative speakers available.

UHF: *Inside the Mani-2, the two woofers are facing each other?*

Bruzzese: No, they're back-to-back. They're connected in reverse phase, so that they move together as a piston. That piston action produces bass that is extremely clean and tight. Also, any resonances within the cabinet can't come back through the woofer, because the twin woofers act as a buffer.

UHF: *What does the Mani-2's impedance curve look like?*

Bruzzese: The impedance curve is not that bad. Sure, it will dip to 4 ohms, or perhaps 3.8 ohms, but it doesn't *rise*, as some speakers do, to 120 ohms or so. So some people run them with as little as 40 or 50 watts. It works, as long as the amplifier is stable, has a nice current flow, and is musical.

UHF: *What kind of amplifier does the Mani-2 like best?*

(Actually, we're rather counting on your being eager to read more. Of course the entire interview with Vince is available in both the print issue and the full electronic edition.)



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INTERCONNECTS

ATLAS NAVIGATOR



An oxygen-free continuous cast (OCC) cable: each strand is made from a single crystal. Two separate internal conductors, plus double shielding (what some people referred to as "semi-balanced," though we prefer "pseudo-balanced"). The double shielding is copper mylar plus close-lapped 99.997% pure OCC copper multi-stranded screen providing 100% RFI protection. The premium "All-Cu" version (shown here) uses solid copper connectors that are also continuous cast. The copper is then silver-plated and double-shielded.We use two in our reference systems. Special-order lengths from the factory.

ORDER: AN-1 pair, 1m, $265, AN-2 pair, 2m, $330

ORDER: ANA-1 All-Cu, 1m, $405, ANA-2 All-Cu, 2m, $470

ATLAS VOYAGER

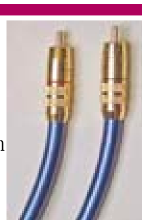


A cable with superior performance at an economical price. Oxygen-free copper, continuously cast, double-shielded with conductive PVC plus close lapped 99.9997% pure OCC copper multi-stranded screen, for 100% coverage against RFI. Direct gold-plated, non compressing, double-screened, self cleaning RCA plugs. Also available with the All-Cu connectors like those of the Navigator (above).

ORDER: AV-1, Voyager 1m pair, $235, AV-2, 2m pair, $285

ORDER: AVA-1, All-Cu 1m pair, $375, AVA-2 2m pair, $420

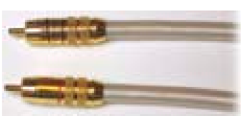
ATLAS QUESTOR



This could be the world's lowest-cost interconnect made from single-crystal copper. It has the same connectors as the Equator (below), and we thought it sounded like a much more expensive cable.

ORDER: AQ-1, 1 m pair Atlas Questor, $135

ATLAS EQUATOR



We figured it was perhaps the best $150 interconnect cable you could buy. Only it costs just $90. And yes, that's in Canadian funds. Other lengths on order.

ORDER: AE-1, 1 m pair Atlas Equator, $90

ORDER: AE-2, 2 m pair Atlas Equator, $123

ACTINOTE MB INTERCONNECT



These Belgian cables use WBT locking connectors, and they are a virtual match for our own reference cables.

ORDER: AMB-1, 1 meter pair Actinote MB, $750

PRISMAL DUAL INTERCONNECT



This Swiss-made cable is back The connectors are especially good, with Teflon dielectric. 174 strands of oxygen-free copper, with braided shield. Toss out your "free" interconnects!

ORDER: PD-1, 1 meter pair Prisma Dual Interconnect, $39.95

ORDER: PD-05, 0.5 meter pair Dual Interconnect, $29.95

TWO CABLES INTO ONE JACK



Need to feed two preamps into two amps? This solid Y-adapter (two jacks into one phono plug) is gold over brass, with Teflon dielectric.

ORDER: FYA, one pair Y adapters, $20

SPEAKER CABLES

SHEFFIELD SPEAKER CABLE

Here's a value that amazed us, from Sheffield (the record company). It's a solid core wire so hard it can be used in a good binding post with no connector (but we'll install the connector of your choice if you prefer).

ORDER: SC10 Sheffield 3m pair, $150

ORDER: SC25 Sheffield 7.5m pair, $250

Two pairs ordered at the same time: 20% off

ATLAS ICHOR SPEAKER CABLE



Continuous-cast single-crystal cable, ready for biwiring. It costs just $235 per meter of double cable (a 2 m pair has 4 meters of wire). We suggest adding the Eichmann Bayonet bananas, $57.95 per set of 4, or WBT connectors (at right).

ATLAS ASCENT SPEAKER CABLE



We had been searching for a good quality but affordable speaker cable, and we found one. This is a single-crystal pure copper cable, fully shielded. The price per meter of wire is $48 (a 3m pair has 6m of cable). Plus connectors. We recommend Eichmann Bayonet Bananas, $57.95/set, two sets needed.

ACTINOTE LB SPEAKER CABLE

We bought a pair for our Alpha system! WBT locking bananas.

ORDER: ALB-3, Actinote 3m pair, $1690

ORDER: ALB-5, Actinote 5m pair, $2360

DIGITAL CABLES

ATLAS COMPASS DIGITAL



Excellent performance at an affordable price. Single crystal pure copper. The 1.5m version sounds way better than a 1m.

ORDER: ACD-1.5 digital cable, 1m, $120

ATLAS OPUS DIGITAL

We dumped our reference cable for this one!

ORDER: AOD-1.5 digital cable, 1.5m, $360

CONNECTOR TREATMENT



ProGold cleans connections and promotes conductivity as well. Small wipes for cleaning accessible contacts, or a squirt bottle for connections you can't reach. We use both regularly.

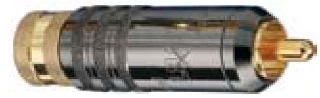
ORDER: PGW box ProGold wipes, $35

ORDER: PGS, can ProGold fluid (now called DeoxIT), $35

ORDER: PGB, both when ordered at the same time, $56

WBT CONNECTORS

The unique WBT phono plugs have a collar which you turn so that the plug tightens around and into the jack! The cable would tear before the plug would come out.



The Topline series (heaviest construction, 5-layered gold plating), includes the 0108 (above), which uses reliable crimping technology, not soldering. Slip a gold-plated sleeve over the bared wire, and crimp it on with the special WBT crimping tool. The crimped end is held in the plug with a Torx screw. Buy the tool at the same time as the connectors, and we'll buy it back at the price you paid when you're through.



ORDER: WBT-0403 crimping tool (refundable), $125.

The sleeves are shown here, actual size.

WBT-0431	0.75 mm sleeve	$0.50	○
WBT-0432	1 mm sleeve	$0.50	○
WBT-0433	1.5 mm sleeve	$0.50	○
WBT-0434	2.5 mm sleeve	$0.50	○
WBT-0435	4 mm sleeve	$0.60	○
WBT-0436	6 mm sleeve	$0.70	○
WBT-0437	10 mm sleeve	$0.85	○
WBT-0438	15 mm sleeve	$0.95	○

ORDER: WBT-0108, kit 4 Topline crimp plugs, $190

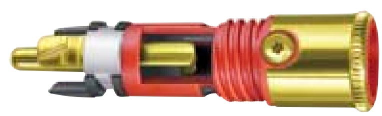
ORDER: WBT-0101, kit 4 Topline solder plugs, $190



The 0144 Midline version has "only" three layers of gold plating, smaller and lighter, with the same locking action.

ORDER: WBT-0144, kit 4 Topline solder plugs, $90

NEW! The high-tech minimum metal "nextgen" phono plugs. Easy to solder, with locking collar. Silver version available.



ORDER: WBT-0110, kit 4 nextgen copper plugs, $170

ORDER: WBT-0110Au, kit 4 nextgen silver plugs, $280

WBT makes banana plugs for speaker cables, all of which lock tightly into any post. All use crimping technology.



ORDER: WBT-0644 Kit 4 Topline straight bananas, $90

ORDER: WBT-0645 Kit 4 angled bananas, $110

ORDER: WBT-0600 Kit 4 Topline bananas, $180

ALSO AVAILABLE: a full line of quality binding posts, phono jacks, etc. Plus a spade lug that connectors under pressure.

ANALOG PRODUCTS

REGA FONO



We can't get over how good it is…and how affordable. The Rega Fono is a superb way to add vinyl to your system. MM version and high sensitivity MC version for cartridges with low output. While stocks last.

ORDER: RF-MM Phono preamp, $395

ORDER: RF-MC high sensitivity phono preamp, $565

LEHMANN BLACK CUBE



The SE version, complete with its PWX premium upgraded power supply, even more affordable. Switchable for MM/MC, with selectable loads.

ORDER: PBC Black Cube SE, $875

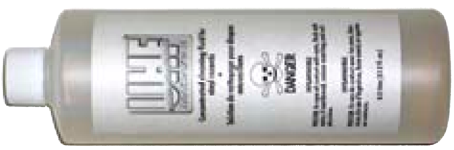
GOLDRING PHONO



Basic MM phono, amazingly good, and especially not shrill. Besides, it's very affordable.

ORDER: PA-100, $225

LP RECORD CLEANER



Concentrated cleaner for LP vacuum cleaning machines. Much safer than some formulas we've seen! Half litre, mix with demineralized or distilled water to make 4 litres.

ORDER: LPC, $19.95

J. A. MICHELL RECORD CLAMP



Clamp your LP to the turntable platter. We use the J. A. Michell clamp, machined from nearly weightless aluminum. Drop it on, press down, tighten the knob.

ORDER: MRC Michell record clamp, $75

TITAN STYLUS LUBRICANT



Amazing, but true: dabbing a bit of this stuff on your stylus every 2 or 3 LPs makes it glide through the groove instead of scraping. Fine artist's brush not included, but readily available in many stores.

ORDER: TSO-1 Titan stylus oil, $39.95

MORE ANALOG…

EXSTATIC RECORD BRUSH



the Goldring Super eXstatic. It includes a hard velvet pad to get into the grooves, plus two sets of carbon fibre tufts. We've worn one out already, because we use it every time!

ORDER: GSX record brush, $36

ELECTRONIC STYLUS GAUGE



When we got our sample of this new gauge, we discovered that our (discontinued) plastic pressure gauge had been lying to us. Glad we checked!

ORDER: ALM, electronic stylus gauge, $185

ZEROSTAT ANTISTATIC PISTOL



A classic adjunct to the brush is the Zerostat anti-static gun. Squeeze the trigger and release: it ionizes the air, which becomes conductive and drains off the static charge. By the way, it works for a lot more than LP's. No batteries needed.

ORDER: Z-1 Zerostat antistatic pistol, $94..95

LP SLEEVES



Keep your records clean and scratch free. Replace dirty, torn or missing inner sleeves with soft-plastic-in-paper Nitty Gritty sleeves.

ORDER: PDI, package of 30 sleeves, $30

TURNTABLE BELT TREATMENT



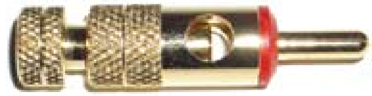
What this is not is a sticky goo for belts on their last legs. Rubber Renue removes oxidation from rubber belts, giving them a new lease on life. But what astonished us is what it does to even a brand new belt. Wipe down your belt every 3 months, and make analog sound better than ever.

ORDER: RRU-100 drive belt treatment, $14.95

IF WE DON'T LIKE IT YOU WON'T SEE IT HERE

CONNECTORS

J. A. MICHELL BANANAS



Michell was a machinist, and his connectors are made to work right. Cheap knockoffs don't. No tools needed. Put the wire into the hole, tighten the back button, and the wire is clamped securely. A hole in the button lets you plug one banana into the other. You can also slide a spade lug behind the button and use it as an adapter. Gold-plated, 24K.

ORDER: GBO kit 4 gold bananas, $30

EICHMANN BAYONET BANANAS



The Eichmann Bayonet Banana uses a minimum of metal, and tellurium copper at that, but clicks



tightly into any binding post with spring action. For soldering or crimping, or both.

ORDER: EBB kit 4 bayonet bananas, $57.95

EICHMANN BULLET PLUGS



The first phono plug to maintain the impedance of the cable itself, by usir metal only as an extension of the wire. Hollow tube centre pin and tiny spring contact for ground. Two easil accessible contacts for soldering, two-screw strain relief. Gold over pure copper. Got silver cable? Get the unique Silver Bullets!

ORDER: EBP kit 4 Bullet Plugs, $54.95

ORDER: EBPA kit 4 Silver Bullets, $139.95

EICHMANN CABLE PODS



Minimum metal, gold over tellurium copper. Unique clamp system: the back button turns but the clamp doesn't. Solder to it, or plug an Eichmann banana into it, even from inside!

ORDER: ECP, set of four posts, $54.95

MICHELL BINDING POSTS



Michell's Big Mother posts (at left) are machined to stay tight. They are used on top speakers, such as ProAc. Gold or rhodium plated. Want to upgrade the binding posts on your amplifier? The Michell MAO (at right)is what you need.

ORDER: Big Mother, 4 gold posts for speakers $55

ORDER: Big Mother-R, 4 rhodium posts for speakers $69

ORDER: MAO, 4 binding posts for amplifiers $40

POSTMAN WRENCH



Think you can tighten your speaker and amp binding posts with your fingers? Try the Dynaclear Postman wrench (for 1/2" or 7/16" hexagonal posts) and find that yours weren't tight after all. Our advice: retighten every three months.

ORDER: Dynaclear Postman, $13

CLEANER POWER

MAXCON² POWER FILTER



Looks great, and does a wonderful job. Made from milled aircraft-grade aluminum, with Furutech and Hubbell connectors. Parallel filtering, so it can be used even with very large power amplifiers. List $1299, but. . .

ORDER: GMC, MaxCon² power line filter, $995

Needs IEC power cord: order one at the same time for 20% off!

ENACOM LINE FILTER



Far less expensive, but astonishingly effective, we wouldn't run our system with less than the Enacom filter. It actually shorts out the hash on the power line. (For 110-120 V only).

ORDER: EAC Enacom line filter, $105

STINGRAY POWER BAR

Most of these things knock the voltage to your equipment way down, and they generate more noise than a kindergarten class.



The Gutwire Stingray doesn't. Superior 12 gauge double-shielded cable, Hubbell hospital grade connectors at both ends. Indispensable!

ORDER: GSR-2 Stingray Squared power bar, $285

MORE POWER TO YOU



A simple improvement: better access to electrical power. Change your 77-cent duplex outlets for these Hubbell 8200 hospital grade outlets. Insert a plug and it just snaps in. A tighter internal connection as well. Possibly the cheapest improvement you can make to your system.

ORDER: AC-DA Hubbell duplex outlet, $23.95

ORDER: AC-DB (more than one outlet), $21.95

ORDER: AC-D20 20A duplex, red color, $28.95

INSTANT CIRCUIT CHECKER

Plug it into an AC outlet, and the three lights can indicate a missing ground, wrong polarity, switched wires — five problems in all, some of which can be fatal. None of them is good for feeding your music or home theatre system. The first thing we did after getting ours was phone the electrician.



ORDER: ACA-1, Instant Circuit Checker, $21

GUTWIRE POWER CABLES

Multiple shielding, including an external electrostatic shield connected to a clip. . . you may get get best performance with or without. Basic Clef and the G Clef are used by UHF. Now in an upgraded version, with performance "squared." Length is 1.7 m, longer cords on order.



Basic Clef² has 165 discrete conductors, 95% shielding by 2 shields.

ORDER: GBC-5 Basic Clef Square, 1.7m, $285

G Clef² has 195 conductors, with 3 shields providing 98% shielding.



G Clef ² can be ordered with a 20A IEC plug (for amplifiers requiring this special plug)..

ORDER: GGC G Clef, Square 1.7m, $385

No budget for the cable you'd like? Make your own! Double-shielded, to avoid picking up or transmitting noise. GutWire 16, assembled or as a kit. (If you are not comfortable around



electricity, we suggest the assembled one.) Both versions include the Hubbell hospital grade plug and a Schurter 15 A IEC 320 connector. The GutWire 12 gauge (kit only, not shown) is a double-shielded 12 gauge power cable with Hubbell hospital grade plug and Wattgate IEC.

ORDER: GW16-1.5K, GutWire 16 gauge power cable kit, $93.95

ORDER: GW16-1.5 GutWire 16 cable, assembled, $133.95

ORDER: GW12-1.5K GutWire 12 gauge kit, $195

IEC ON YOUR DVD PLAYER

Why do big name DVD players come with those tiny plugs for their cords. A good shielded power cable will do wonders! Take $18 off if you order it at the same time as a G Clef or



Basic Clef cable, or $8 off if you order one with any of our other AC cables.

ORDER: DVD-A, GutWire adapter, $39

SUPER ANTENNA

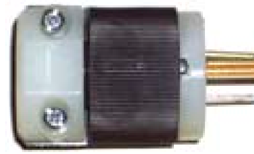
Unlike a whip, a dipole is bidirectional, so you can orient it. Ours has no switch to muck things up, and with a 1.8m low-loss 75 ohm cable and gold-plated push-on F connector, it has low internal loss. Its broadband design covers the channels 2-69 TV bands as well as FM.



ORDER: FM-S Super Antenna, MkII, $55

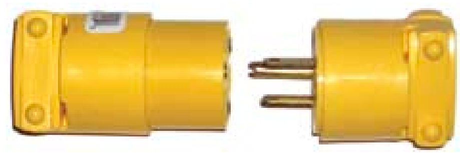
HOSPITAL GRADE CONNECTION

When we put a quality AC plug on our kettle, boiling time dropped by 90 seconds! The best AC plug we have ever seen is the Hubbell 8215 hospital grade plug. It connects to wires under high pressure, and it should last forever.



ORDER: AC-P2 Hubbell cord plug, $25.95

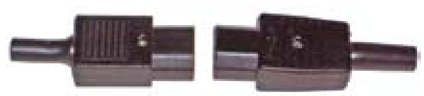
Amazingly good at a much lower price are these two cord plugs from Eagle. No hospital rating, but a rather good mechanical connection. Male and female versions.



ORDER: AC-P1 Eagle male cord plug, $5.95

ORDER: AC-PF Eagle female cord plug, $5.95

Making your own power cords for your equipment? You'll need the hard-to-get IEC 320 connector to fit the gear. We have two sizes.



ORDER: AC-P3 10 ampere IEC 320 plug, $9.95

ORDER: AC-P4 15 ampere Schurter IEC 320 plug, $18.95

SILVER SOLDER

This is a lovely solder, from the company that makes Enacom line filters (which we also like). Wakø-Tech solder contains 4% silver, no lead.



ORDER: SR-4N, 100 g solder roll, $59.95

BETTER DIGITAL

IMPROVED CD WITH FINYL

This is the most famous of all the treatments for Compact Discs. The maker of Finyl claims it reduces surface reflections and provides a higher contrast image for the laser cell of your player. Use it just once. We get a lot of repeat orders on it. One kit can treat over 200 discs. Or order the refill.

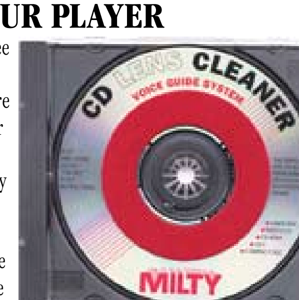


ORDER: F-1 Finyl kit, $40.00

ORDER: F-1R Finyl refill, $35.00

CLEAN YOUR PLAYER

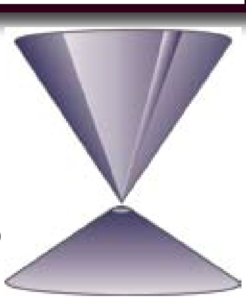
After as little as three months, your new player will have more trouble reading your CD's. Why? Dust on the lens. We're happy to have found the new Milty CD lens cleaner. Unlike some commonly-available discs, the Milty is non-abrasive, so we use it and rest easy. Wet or dry.



ORDER: 2021 Milty CD lens cleaner, $35

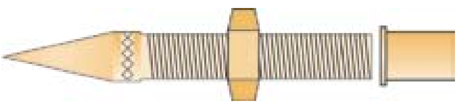
SUPPORT SYSTEMS

TENDERFEET



Machined cones are wonderful things to put under speakers or other audio equipment. They anchor it mechanically and decouple it acoustically at the same time. Tenderfeet come in various versions: tall (as shown) or flattened, in either anodized silver or black. Tall Tenderfeet have threaded holes for a machine screw, or for the optional hanger bolt, which lets you screw it into wood. If you have a fragile hardwood floor, add the optional Tendercup (shown above) to protect it.

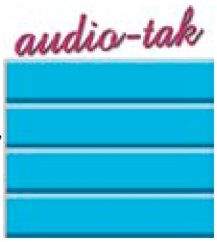
ORDER: TFG, tall silver Tenderfoot, $15
ORDER: TFGN, tall black Tenderfoot, $16.50
ORDER: TFP, flat silver Tenderfoot, $10
ORDER: TCP, silver Tendercup, $10
ORDER: THB, hanger bolt for Tenderfeet, each $0.80



Do you prefer spikes for your speakers. Target spikes and sockets mount in wood. Available with or without tools.

ORDER: S4W kit, 8 spikes, sockets and tools, $39
ORDER: S4WS kit, 8 spikes and sockets, $30

AUDIO-TAK



It's blue, and it's a sort of modelling clay that never dries. Anchor speakers to stands, cones to speakers, and damp out vibration. Leaflet with suggested uses.

ORDER: AT-2, Audio-Tak pack, $10

THE SUPERSPIKE



This is unique: a sealed unit containing a spike and a cup to receive it. It won't scratch even hardwood floors. For speakers or equipment stands, on bare floors only. Four sizes of threaded shanks are available.

ORDER: SSKQ, 4 Superspikes, 1/4" shank, $75
ORDER: SSKT, 4 Superspikes, 5/16" shank, $75
ORDER: SSKS, 4 Superspikes, 6 mm shank, $75
ORDER: SSKH, 4 Superspikes, 8 mm shank, $75

WHAT SIZE SUPERSPIKE?

A good ruler will let you figure it out. The stated size is the outer diameter of the threaded shank. Then count the threads:

1/4" shank: 20 threads/inch
5/16" shank: 18 threads/inch
M6 (6mm) shank: 10 threads/cm
M8 (8mm) shank: 8 threads/cm



We have also have a Superspike foot (at right) that replaces those useless feet on CD players, amps, etc., using the same screws to fasten them. And there's a stick-on version (not shown) for other components.

ORDER: SSKF, 4 Superspike replacement feet, $80
ORDER: SSKA, 3 stick-on Superspike feet, $50

AN ON-THE-WALL IDEA



Need to fasten a speaker securely to the wall? Nothing beats the Smarter Speaker Support for ease of installation or for sheer strength. And it holds the speaker off the wall, so it can be used even with rear-ported speakers. Easily adjustable with two hands, not three, tested to an incredible 23 kg! Glass-filled polycarbonate is unbreakable. Screws and anchors included, available in two colors.

ORDER: SSPS, pair of black speaker supports, $29.95
ORDER: SSPS-W, pair of white speaker supports, $29.95

FOUNDATION STANDS



Absolutely the best speaker stand known to us. They're filled with a proprietary material that deadens the stand completely. Matte black, with spikes adjustable from the top. Height 61 cm (24").

ORDER: FFA, one pair Foundation stands, $1125

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AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS, RECOMMENDED BY UHF STAFF

REFERENCE RECORDINGS

Beachcomber (LP) ✔
A change of pace for Fennell and the Dallas Wind Ensemble.Includes Tico Tico, A Chorus line, and a version of 76 Trombones you'll remember for a long time. The sound is glorious.

Holst (LP) ✔
From the composer of The Planets, 3 suites for wind band, plus the Hammersmith Prelude and Scherzo. Fine power playing by the Dallas Wind Symphony.

Trittico (LP/HDCD) ✔
A large helping of famous wind band leader Frederick Fennell doing powerhouse music by Grieg, Albeniz, Nelhybel, etc. Complex and energetic. LP version is double.

Fennell Favorites (LP)
The Dallas Wind Symphony: Bach, Brahms, Prokofiev and more. Fireworks on this rare Reference LP.

The Oxnard Sessions, vol. 1 (LP) ✔
Pianist Michael Garson, of Serendipity fame, takes on familiar standards, backed by five fine musicians. Inventive and beautiful.

Serendipity (LP) ✔
The original Micharl Garson recording, in which he gets upstaged by saxophonist Gary Herbig! Exceptional!

Dick Hyman - Fats Waller (LP)
Analog version of this famous recording, cut to CD during the performance. Keith Johnson simultaneously recorded the performance on his own hand-built analog recorder.

Blazing Redheads (LP)
Not all redheads, this all-female salsa-flavored big band adds a lot of red pepper to its music.

Felix Hell (HDCD)
The young organ prodigy turns in mature versions of organ music of Liszt, Vierne, Rheinberger and Guilmant. Huge bottom end!

American Requiem (HDCD)
Richard Danielpour's awesome Requiem mass is all about war, and about the hope for peace too, with a dedication tied to 9/11.

PLUS THESE HDCD RECORDINGS:

Pomp&Pipes (HDCD) ✔
Requiem (HDCD) ✔
From the Age of Swing (HDCD) ✔
Swing is Here (HDCD) ✔
Copland Symphony No. 3 (HDCD) ✔
Medinah Sessions, two CDs for one (HDCD)
Ports of Call (HDCD)
Tutti (HDCD)
Bruckner Symphony No. 9 (HDCD) ✔
Ein Heldenleben (HDCD) ✔

SHEFFIELD

Say It With Music (CD) ✔
Margie Gibson sings Irving Berlin in what may be one the greatest jazz vocal recordings of all time. And Sheffield put her there in your living room!

Growing Up in Hollywood Town (XRCD) ✔
FIM's XRCD version of the original Amanda McBroom direct-cut release. Great to see it back!

Drum/Track Record (XRCD2) ✔
Crème de la crème (CD)

OPUS 3

Showcase 2005 (SACD)
The latest Opus 3 sampler, with Eric Bibb, Mattias Wager, the Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble and lots more, in glorious SACD.

Peder af Ugglas (SACD/LP)
Ugglas plays a number of different guitars, and borrows from jazz, Blues, and (yes!) country. Includes piano, organ, trombone, bowed saw, and more.

Organ Treasures (SACD) ✔
All those showpieces for big organ you remember hearing through huge systems. . .only with all of the power and the clarity of Super Audio. 4.1 channels, plus 2-channel CD.

Just Like Love (SACD/LP) ✔
The newest from Eric Bibb, less oriented to Gospel and more to Blues. Bibb's group, Needed Time, is not here, but he's surrounded by half a dozen fine musicians. A nice recording. Hybrid disc, with a CD layer and a Super Audio high definition layer.

Comes Love (HDCD) ✔
Another disc by the terrific Swedish Jazz Kings, led by saxophonist Tomas Ornberg, proving again Sweden understands jazz. The sound is luminous, sometimes dazzling.

It's Right Here For You (HDCD) ✔
Is there, anywhere, a better swing band than The Swedish Jazz Kings (formerly Tömas Ormberg's Blue Five)? Closer to Kansas City than to Stockholm, they are captivating.

Test CD 4 (SACD)
A sampler of Opus 3 performers, clearer than you've ever heard them before. Hybrid disc.

Test CD 5 (HDCD) ✔
Another of Opus 3's wonderful samplers, including blues, jazz, and classical music. A number of fine artists, captured with the usual pure Blumlein stereo setup. A treat.

Showcase (SACD/LP) ✔
Available as a hybrid SACD/CD disc, or a gorgeously-cut LP, with selections from Opus 3 releases.

Good Stuff (DOUBLE 45 LP/HDCD/SACD) ✔
As soothing as a summer breeze, this disc features singer Eric Bibb (son of Leon), singing and playing guitar along with his group. Subtle weaving of instrumentation, vivid sound.

Spirit and the Blues (DOUBLE 45 LP/CD/SACD) ✔
Like his father, the legendary Leon Bibb, Eric Bibb understands the blues. He and the other musicians, all playing strictly acoustic instruments, have done a fine recording, and Opus 3 has made it sound exceptional.

Tiny Island (HDCD/SACD)
If you like Eric Bibb and his group Good Stuff as much as we do, pick this one up.

20th Anniversary Celebration Disc (HDCD) ✔
A great sampler from Opus 3. Includes some exceptional fine pieces, jazz, folk and classical. The sound pickup is as good as it gets, and the HDCD transfer is luminous.

Levande (LP/CD) ✔
The full recording from which "Tiden Bara Går" on Test Record No.1 is taken. Believe it or not, this great song isn't even the best on the album! A fine singer, doing folklike material…and who cares about understanding the words?

Concertos for Double Bass (CD/SACD) ✔
This album of modern and 19th Century music is a favorite for its deep, sensuous sound. And the music is worth discovering. It is sensuous and lyrical, a delight in every way.

Across the Bridge of Hope (SACD)
An astonishing choral recording by the Erik Westberg Ensemble, famous for its Musica Sacra choral recording.

Tomas Ornberg's Blue Five (CD)
Musica Sacra (HDCD/SACD) ✔
Test Record No.4 (LP) ✔
Clarinet Concertos (LP/CD)

PROPRIUS

Antiphone Blues (CD) ✔
This famous disc offers an unusual mix: sax and organ! The disc includes Ellington, Negro spirituals, and some folk music. Electrifying performance, and the recording quality is unequalled.

Antiphone Blues (SACD/HDCD) ✔
This is the Super Audio version, with a Red Book layer that is HDCD-encoded. The best of both worlds!

Now the Green Blade Riseth (CD/SACD) ✔
Religious music done in a new way: organ, chorus and modern orchestra. Stunning music, arranged and performed by masters, and the emotional effect is joyous. The sound is clear, and the sheer depth is unequalled on CD. The new SACD version is the very best SACD we have yet heard!

Jazz at the Pawnshop (LP/CD/SACD-HDCD) ✔
A double album of live jazz, with nearly perfect sound. It has been famous among audiophiles for years. Also available as double SACD/HDCD gold disc on FIM label, or single CD.

Jazz at the Pawnshop 2 (CD/SACD) ✔
From the original master tape, another LP of jazz from this Swedish "British" pub, with its lifelike 3-D sound. Now a classic in its own right.

Good Vibes (CD)
The third volume of Jazz at the Pawnshop. And just as good!

Cantate Domino (CD/SACD) ✔
This choral record has become a classic of audiophile records. The title selection is stunningly beautiful. The second half is Christmas music, and includes the most stunning version of O Holy Night we've ever heard.

Bergsten & Nordahl Play Lars Gullin (CD)
Piano and sax performance of the bebop music of the late Swedish composer Lars Gullin.

Sketches of Standard (CD)

ANALEKTA

Graupner: Vocal & Instr. Music vol.1 (CD)
Geneviève Soly and Les idées heureuses play music from a lost genius whose reputation once outshon Bach's.

Graupner: Partitas, vol.1 (CD)
Geneviève Soly plays some of Christoph Graupner's incredibly rich harpsichord music

Graupner: Vocal & Instr. Music vol.2 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.3 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.4 (CD)
Graupner: Partitas vol.5 (CD)
Graupner: Christmas in Darmstadt (CD)
SPECIAL PRICE ON ALL 8 CDs (see last page)

Violonchello Español (CD) ✔
I Musici de Montréal comes to Analekta, with a stunning album of Spanish and Spanish-like pieces for cello and orchestra: Glazunov, de Falla, Albéniz, Granados, and more.

Vivace (CD) ✔
Classical or rock? Claude Lamothe plays two cellos at the same time in an amazing recording of modern compositions.

Pauline Viardot-Garcia (CD) ✔
Soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian steps into the role of 19th Century singer and composer Pauline Viardot so convincingly that listening to her is like going back in time. One of the best classical recordings of all time!

Beethoven: Hammerklavier Sonatas (CD)
Anton Kuerti tackles the two impressive sonatas.

Brahms Lieder (CD)
Canadian mezzo-contralto reveals what she truly is: one of the truly great voices.

Beethoven: Symphonies 5 & 6 (CD)
Tafelmusik steps outside its usual repertoire of Baroque on period instruments. Under the baton of Bruno Weil, this fine orchestra turns in a gorgeous rendition of two of Beethoven's most memorable symphonies. Natural sound, too.

Mozart: Auernhammer Sonatas (CD)
A double CD of sonatas for violin and piano. It's Mozart, of course, but it is also gorgeously played.

Bach Sonatas for violin & harpsichord, vol.1 (CD)
Two Analekta superstars come together: violinist James Ehnes and harpsichordist Luc Beauséjour. Irresistible

Bach Suites, Airs & Dances (CD)
Keyboard music from J.S. and C.P.E. Bach, arranged for concert accordion by Canadian virtuoso Joseph Petric. Incredibly gorgeous…it just had to be done!

Mendelssohn: Cello & Piano (CD)
The Duo Similia is made up of striking blonde twins, who play flute and guitar. Familiar airs from Mozart, Fauré, Elgar, Ravel, lots more. Fine listening.

Romantic Pieces (CD) ✔
How does James Ehnes manage to get such a sweet sound from his Stradivarius? Czech pieces from Smetana, Dvorak and Janacek. The playing is as glorious as the tone, and the sound is sumptuous. **Bonus:** Analekta's 10th sampler is included.

Once Upon a Time… (Video DVD)
Violinist Angèle Dubeau et her La Pietà string group with a spectacular video of music inspired by the Underworld…with the devil himself in attendence. Includes other videos plus two CD's worth of uncompressed music. Superb!

Cantabile (CD)
The Duo Similia is made up of striking blonde twins, who play flute and guitar. Familiar airs from Mozart, Fauré, Elgar, Ravel, lots more. Fine listening.

Nota del Sol (CD) ✔
The Labrie twins are back, with a delightful recording of flute and guitar music by Piazzola, Pujol and Machado. Joyous works, wonderfully played and recorded

Fantasia (CD)
A third, gorgeous, recording by the twins, on flute and guitar.

Fritz Kreisler (CD)
Possibly the best recording of Kreisler's delightful violin music: James Ehnes and his Strad bring a new magic to this fine disc.

French Showpieces (CD) ✔
Awesome violinist James Ehnes, with the Quebec City Symph. takes on Saint-Saëns, Berlioz, Chausson, Massenet, and more. A recording to die for, awesome both artistically and sonically!

Best of the Red Army Chorus (CD) ✔
The 1989 LP is finally on CD: Dark Eyes, the Volga Boat Song, Moscow Nights, and even the old Soviet anthem. By far the best-sounding disc of this legendary ensemble.

A los ancestros (CD)
Cuban-born Carolos Placeres, with songs incorporating Cuban rhythm with influences of Africa and lots of other places. Six musicians in all, and all acoustic.

Bach: Coffee Cantata (CD)
The celebrated Tafelmusik ensemble does two secular cantatas (inluding Peasant Cantata). Fine singers, lifelike sound!

Mozart: Soprano Arias (CD)
Soprano Lyne Fortin, with the Orchestre Métropolitain, totally at ease with all three soprano roles from The Marriage of Figaro (including a duet with herself!).

Handel (CD) ✔
Superb soprano Karina Gauvin is joined by the Toronto chamber ensemble Tafelmusik in a series of glowing excerpts from Handel's "Alcina" and "Agrippina." The sound is smooth and lifelike, with an acute sense of place.

Little Notebook of Anna Magdalana Bach (CD) ✔
More than 30 delightful pieces, most by Bach himself. Soprano Karina Gauvin's magnificent voice is mated to Luc Beauséjour's excellent harpsichord work. The sound is deep, detailed and warm, truly of audiophile quality.

Vivaldi: Motets for Soprano (CD) ✔
In this disc by wonderful soprano Karina Gauvin, she tackles the gorgeous but very difficult vocal music of Vivaldi: two motets and a psalm. It is a moving interpretation, on this jewel of a recording.

Vivaldi: Per Archi (CD)
Telemann Sonatas for 2 Violins (CD)
Mendelssohn: 2 Violin Concertos (CD
Opera for Two (CD)
Villa-Lobos (CD)

AUDIOQUEST

Mississipi Magic (CD/SACD)
The legendary Blues, Gospel, rock and world beat singer and musician Terry Evans, in an energetic recording we loved.

Come to Find (CD) ✔
The first disc by bluesman Doug McLeod is every bit as impressive as the second, and no blues fan should resist it. Over-the-top guitar work, great rhythm, all-acoustic backup. Great sound, too.

You Can't Take My Blues (CD) ✔
Singer/songwriter Doug MacLeod and his colleagues present one of the most satisfying blues records ever made, with touching words and devilish rhythms. Mostly acoustic instruments.

Unmarked Road (SACD)
The third disc from the great blues singer and guitarist Doug McLeod is every bit as good as the first. These songs have powerful rhythm, and can make you smile and cry at the same time.

Whose Truth, Whose Lies (SACD) ✔
The third disc from the great blues singer and guitarist Doug McLeod is t as good as the first. These songs have powerful rhythm, and can make you smile and cry at the same time.

Bluesquest sampler (CD)

SILENCE

Tres Americas (CD)
A gold audiophile disc of lively Latin fusion music. Irka Mateo and Tadeo de Marco sing and play, drawing their influence from Africa as well as their native Brazil. Clear, close-in sound.

Djembé Tigui (CD)
This gold disc features the voice and percussion of African artist Sekou Camara, captured by the famous Soundfield microphone. Camara died just before the disc was released. We've just received new stock of this recording, which we have sold worldwide.

Styles (CD)
Is this ever a surprising disc! Violinist Marc Bélanger worked up these string études for his music students, but they actually deserve to be put out on a gold audiophile disc! The more strings he adds, the better it gets.

Fable (CD)
Easygoing modern jazz by Rémi Bolduc and his quartet, on this gold disc. Some exceptional guitar and bass solos.

Musique Guy St-Onge (CD)
One-man band St-Onge plays dozens of instruments — scores for fourteen films which never existed outside of his imagination. Fun pretext, clever, attractive music that makes you wish you could see the films!

HI-RES MUSIC (FOR DVD PLAYERS)

Brazilian Soul (24/96 DVD)
Guitarists Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Byrd, plus percussion and bass, in an intimate yet explosive recording of samba and bossa nova music. Great!

Jazz/Concord (24/96 DVD)
We're in 1972, and you have tickets to hear Herb Ellis, Joe Pass, Ray Brown and Jake Hanna at the Concord Jazz Festival. You won't ever forget it. Now you can there, with this astonishing high resolution disc that goes in your DVD.

Rhythm Willie (24/96DVD) ✔
Guitarists Herb Ellis and Freddie Green, With bassist Ray Brown and others. This is an uncompressed 24 bit 96 kHz disc that can be played on any video DVD player. Awesome!

Trio (24/96 DVD) ✔
Pianist Monty Alexander with Herb Ellis and Ray Brown. "Makes CD sound seem as if it's coming through a drinking straw." Playable on any DVD player, uncompressed.

Seven Come Eleven (24/96 DVD)
Herb Ellis and Ray Brown again, but this time with guitarist Joe Pass (he and Ellis alternate playing lead and rhythm), and a third guitarist, Jake Hanna. This is a live recording from the 1974 Concord Jazz Festival.

Soular Energy (24-96 DVD/ 24-192 DVD-Audio) ✔
Perhaps the world's greatest bassist, the late Ray Brown, playing with pianist Gene Harris, whom Brown called one of the greats. The proof is right on this 24/96 recording, made from the analog master. Side 2 has a 24/192 DVD-A version.

KLAVIER

Poetics (CD) ✔
A superb wind band recording which includes a breathtaking concerto for percussion.

Ghosts (CD) ✔
This haunting(!) wind band recording features a suite of music that could be the soundtrack to a film that will keep you awake nights. A recording of astonishing dynamics and depth

Caprice (CD) ✔
Formerly titled Harp Spectacular. Can harp be spectacular? Believe it! This famous Klavier recording features Susann McDonald playing Fauré, Glinka and Liszt, is a powerhouse! Engineered by Keith Johnson, a great transfer by Bruce Leek.

Sonatas for Flute and Harp
These same great artists with sonatas by Krumpholz and Damase, as well as Spohr and Glinka. Oh yes, and a spectacular solo harp version of Ibert's hilarious Entr'acte .

Norman Dello Joio (CD) ✔
This contemporary composer delights in the tactile sound of the wind band, and the Keystone Wind Ensemble does his music justice. So does the sound, of astonishing quality!

Carmina Burana (CD)
The celebrated Carl Orff oratorio sends chills down your spine, thanks to the huge orchestra, gigantic choir, and of course the clarity and depth of the Klavier sound.

Obsecion (CD)
The Trio Amadé plays Piazzola, Berstein, Copland, and Emilion Cólon. . .who is the trio cellist. The Colón and Piazzola is definitely worth the price of admission. Lifelike sound.

Misbehavin' (CD)
The superb Denver Brass does Gershwin (Cuban Overture, Porgy and Bess), plus On the Town, Sweet Georgia Brown, and of course Ain't Misbehavin'. Great sound.

Hemispheres (CD)
The North Texas Wind Symphony with new music by contemporary composers who know how to thrill. Some of the best wind band sound available.

Illuminations (CD)
Absolutely great chamber musicians take on music by Villa-Lobos, Malcolm Arnold, and some composers you may not know but you'll wish you did. Sublime sound, nothing less.

Mozart Serenade and Divertimenti (CD)
Lowell Graham (of Center Stage fame, Wilson Audio) conducts a glowing version of these pieces, including the famous "Grand Partita." The engineering, by Bruce Leek, is absolutely first-rate.

Kickin' the Clouds Away (CD)
Gershwin died more than 60 years ago, but you can hear him playing piano in glowing stereo. Nineteen of his pieces are on this fine CD, including a solo piano version of the Rhapsody in Blue.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS MUSIC

Film Spectacular II (XRCD)
The orchestra of Stanley Black plays some of the greatest film music of bygone years. From the original Decca Phase 4 tape.

Mozart: Sinfonia Concertante (XRCD)
Igor and David Oistrakh with the Moscow Philharmonic, in a glorious 1963 recording, from the original master tape

Artistry oi Linda Rosenthal (HDCD) ✔
The great violinist Rosenthal plays favorites: Hora Staccato, Perpetuum Mobile, Debussy's Beau Soir, etc.

Suite Española (XRCD) ✔
The Albéniz suite, gorgeously orchestrated by Rafael Frühbeck de

Burgos, who conducts the New Philharmonia. Beautifully remastered from the original 1963 tape.

Audiophile Reference IV (SACD) ✔
A stunning sampler, with recognizable audiophile selections you have never heard sound this good!

Café Blue (HDCD/CD) ✔
A gold HDCD version of iconoclast jazz singer Patricia Barber's 1994 classic, an audiophile underground favorite. Or get the original CD, at lower cost.

MISCELLANEOUS

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All of the classical world's most important heritage, on 50 audiophile-quality gold CDs, at under $4 per CD. Fine artists from Germany, Austria, the UK, Eastern Europe. See the list on our Web site, and listen to excerpts on line.

Blues for the Saxophone Club (HDCD)
Swing jazz pianist Jeremy Monteiro, with guest artists, including saxophonist Ernie Watts. The HDCD sound is explosive!

Only Trust Your Heart (HDCD)
Intimate sax variations by Greg Fishman, wonderfully accompanied by the excellent pianist Jeremy Monteiro.

Vinyl Essentials (LP)
A test LP to do this hasn't been available for years. Use it to check cartridge/arm resonance, tracking ability, crosstalk, and more.

Neil Diamond: Serenade (CD)
Just eight songs on this European CBS disc, but what songs! I've Been This Way Before, Lady Magdalene, Reggae Strut, The Gift of Song, and more. Glowing sound too.

Harry Belafonte (CD)
We haven't heard Belafonte sound like this except on analog. The 16 songs include Island in the Sun, Jamaica Farewell, Midnight Special, Michael Row the Boat Ashore, Brown Skin Girl, etc.

Sources (CD) ✔
A wonderful recording by Bïa (pronounced Bee-yah). She's Brazilian, lives in France, recorded this terrific album (in 5 languages!) in Montreal. Just her warm voice and guitar, plus a handful of other fine musicians. Sound to match.

La mémoire du vent (CD)
The original recording by Bïa, in French, Portuguese and English. If you love her second one, don't hesitate.

Carmin (CD) ✔
The third by Bïa. Different this time, with more money for production, but it has been spent wisely. Superb songs, gloriously sung in Portuguese, French and the ancient Aymara language.

Coeur vagabond (CD)
Bïa sings French songs in Portuguese, Brazilian songs in French. A delight, as usual from this astonishing singer

Audiophile (CD) ✔
The CD release of Secret of the Andes, the Nautilus disc we wouldn't review a speaker without. Pianist Victor Feldman and a whole set of jazz greats. Second LP, Soft Shoulder, also included

Nightclub (CD) ✔
Patricia Barber, doing nightclub standards rather than her own songs. But can she do them!

Modern Cool (CD)
The previous release from Patricia Barber, including songs she does live on the Companion live disc (see below).

Companion (CD) ✔
Patricia Barber at a bargain price: a 45 minute live concert from Chicago. Great music, amazingly lifelike sound.

Payment by VISA or MasterCard, cheque or money order (in Canada). All merchandise is guaranteed unless explicitly sold "as is." Certain items (the Super Antenna, the EAC line filter, and most standard-length cables) may be returned within 21 days less shipping cost. Other items may be subject to a restocking charge. Defective recordings will be exchanged for new copies.

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TO OTHER COUNTRIES: up to $30, 18%. Up to $60, 15%. Above $60, 10%. Magazines, books and taxes are not counted toward the total.

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✔ = INDICATES RECORDINGS USED IN UHF EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

VINYL ALBUMS

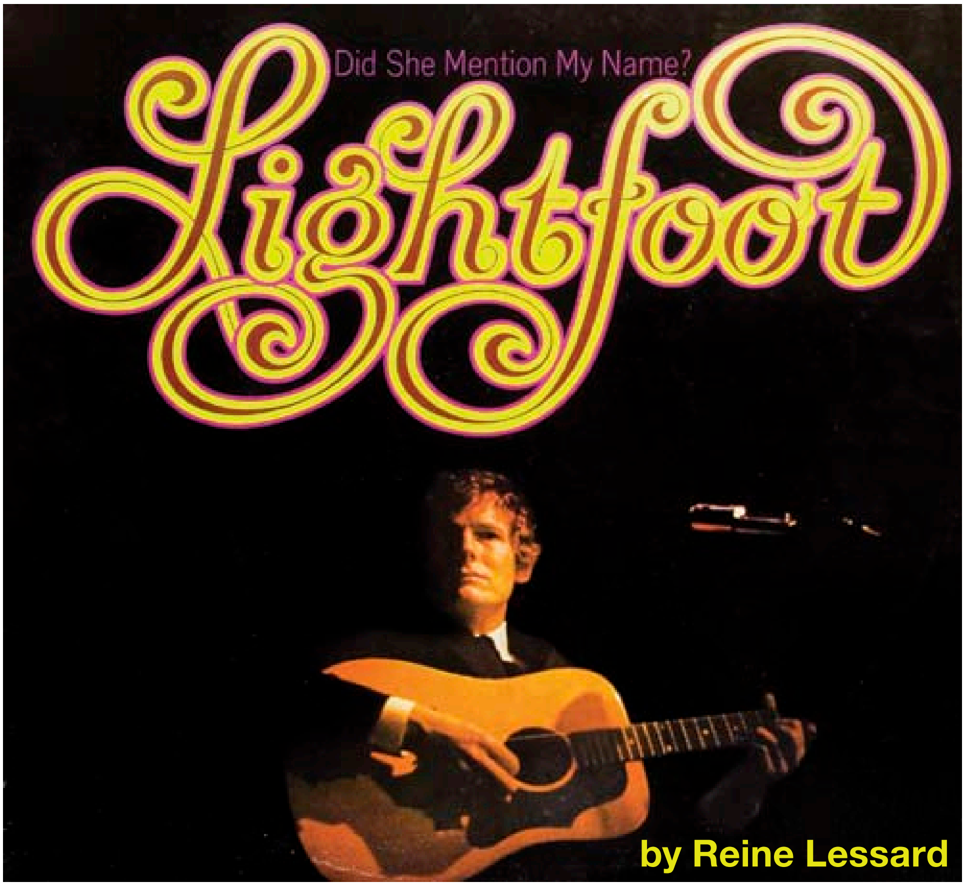
Beachcomber	RR-62	35.00
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by Reine Lessard

Gordon Lightfoot, and how he changed a whole corner of music

We are in Peterborough, in the Province of Ontario, Canada. This evening there is a benefit concert for the victims of severe flooding, and the local hockey arena has been turned into a concert hall.

The mood is feverish, for tonight marks the return of a hero. For the first time since his grave illness, save for a brief appearance in Orillia, Gordon Lightfoot will sing for his fans. He is accompanied by his best friend, his acoustic guitar. An ovation greets him as he steps onto the stage.

Then all is quiet. In the audience are staff members of the McMaster University Medical Centre. One of those members is Dr. Michael Marcaccio, who operated on Lightfoot several times over a 13-week period in the Fall of 2002.

Thinner now, with a voice no less pleasant for its weariness, Lightfoot seems surprisingly at ease. He sings five of his hits, including the legendary If You Could Read My Mind *and his most recent,* Inspiration Lady.

Emotion can be read on the faces of the audience members. He is back, finally, this native son.

The vagabond poet

A prolific composer and lyricist, an unparalleled performer, a guitarist, an environmentalist, the poet of love and tragedy, a pioneer of Canadian music, the darling of Canadians for decades… such is my subject. How many frontiers has he crossed, guitar slung over his shoulder, how many halls has he occupied, how many dreams has he launched? How many has he helped, motivated or even saved, among the lonely, the lovelorn, the discouraged, or those down on their luck, with a few simple words, with an enchanting melody?

It is a mark of the love so many have for him that their hearts skipped a beat when came the agonizing news of his hospitalization, for surgery from which he might not awaken. It was in 2002.

His fans could and can be found everywhere, in all walks of life, in all age groups, for our romantic troubadour is back on the road. He travels his beloved land that is bounded by three seas. And he is every bit as welcome in Europe, in Australia, in the United States, where he takes his songs and wins over the crowds.

Hints of things to come

Gordon Meredith Lightfoot is born on November 1938 in Orillia, Ontario. The small port town near the picturesque junction of lakes Simcoe and Couchiching, not far from Georgian Bay, is known for its pleasant countryside and its wide open spaces.

Gordon Meredith Sr., his father, is a descendant of the Lightfoots of Scotland and Ireland, and his mother Jessica traces her roots back to the first white settlers in Orillia, which had until then been entirely a Native area.

Gordon is still a young boy when his parents split up. His gift of a fine soprano voice opens the doors of St. Paul's United Church choir, with which he sings *I'm a Little Teapot* at the age of five. The choir conductor, Ray Williams, is mightily impressed and endeavors to teach him to put expression into his songs. His mother, whose love of music he seems to have inherited, encourages him, naturally, to become a singer. It is the right choice. When he is 10, accompanied at the piano by his sister Beverly, he makes his first recording. His parents are his biggest fans. His mother clears the way for him to sing at such halls as the Kiwanis, and his father is always ready to drive him where he needs to go for a rehearsal or a concert.

In 1950 he takes classical piano and singing lessons, still with Ray Williams, and his performance of *Bless This House* at an amateur contest at the Orillia Opera Station earns him second prize. It is only the beginning, for the following year he records a 78 of *The Lord's Prayer.*

The next two years are a turning point for the young Gordon. At a competition of singers younger than 13 at the Toronto Kiwanis annual festival, he comes first. He wins again a year later, this time in the category of singers whose voices have not yet changed. The prize includes the chance to sing



his winning performance at Toronto's fabled Massey Hall.

Inaugurated in 1894 and renovated several times since, Massey Hall is already celebrated for the artistic events held there. Our young artist will make singing there a habit. In the meantime, to his piano courses he adds guitar lessons and becomes a self-taught drummer as well. Despite his youth he is often invited to sing on the radio, and in oratorios and operettas.

In 1955 he writes his very first song. He is then all of 17.

After high school he goes to Los Angeles to study jazz orchestration at the Westlake College of Modern Music. Back in Canada, from 1958 to 1961, he becomes a member of the Swinging Eight, who often perform on CBC's *Country Hoedown*. That leads to numerous guest spots. He also becomes a member of the Gino Silvi Singers, the house chorale of CBC-TV's *Juliette*. He forms a duo with Terry Whelan, the Two Tones, and in 1962 records two live albums. The same year he sings at the Mariposa Folk Festival, founded in his home town of Orillia, which brings together Canadian and international folk-oriented artists. Over the years the festival will go through successive changes in name and orientation, but it will survive, and Gordon Lightfoot will sing there often, alongside such artists as Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez.

The summer of 1963 finds Lightfoot in England, where he hosts the *Country and Western Show* on TV.

His career is rolling now.

A phenomenal ascension

One evening, in one of the coffee houses that are everywhere in the 60's, Lightfoot is noticed by a talent scout who is charmed by his fine baritone voice and his expressiveness, and offers to let him be heard on disc. He records half a dozen songs, two of them his own compositions: *The Long River* and *Betty Mae's a Good Time Gal*. It is about at the same time that this handsome young man with the imposing presence begins to sing his own songs and accompany himself on the guitar. He is seen more and more often at folk music events in Ontario, Quebec and the eastern USA, and of course at the Mariposa Festival.

Ian Tyson and his then wife Sylvia, a Canadian folk duo internationally popular under the name Ian and Sylvia, are the first to record Lightfoot's songs, including *Early Morning Rain* and *For Lovin' Me*, which become hits. It's enough for New York agent Albert Grossman to sign him to a recording contract at United Artists.

Grossman will play a particularly significant role in the development of Lightfoot's career, for he is also Bob Dylan's agent, and he encourages him to move, like Dylan, to the pop-rock genre. His music will still, however, contain elements of folk and country, and he will be at ease moving from one to another.

Early Morning Rain has a wider international career too, becoming a hit for French *chansonnier* Joe Dassin under the title *Dans la brume du matin*.

The year 1965 is a major one for Lightfoot. He sings at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island and in New York City, and Marty Robbins will sing his *Ribbon of Darkness*, a song about a man pained by the loss of the woman he loves.

Ribbon of darkness over me
Since my true love walked out the door
Tears I never had before

In Canada, *Spin Spin* is a major success, and *I'm Not Saying* will be his first chart hit. That song is popularized in the US by country star Leroy Van Dyke.

Continuing his phenomenal rise, he reaches new audiences thanks to his songs being picked up by such established stars as Harry Belafonte, Anne Murray and Nana Mouskouri. Famed US country singer George Hamilton IV brings out an LP of his songs, *Lightfoot Country*. Richie Havens and The Kingston Trio sing Lightfoot too.

In 1966, with the release of his self-titled album, Lightfoot becomes one of the first Canadian singers to know glory in his own country without having to move to the United States. The album will make him even better known as a songwriter, and his songs are picked up by Petula Clark, Stompin' Tom Connors, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis,

Elvis Presley and Barbra Streisand.

And oh yes…by Bob Dylan, who holds Lightfoot in the highest esteem.

A historical interlude

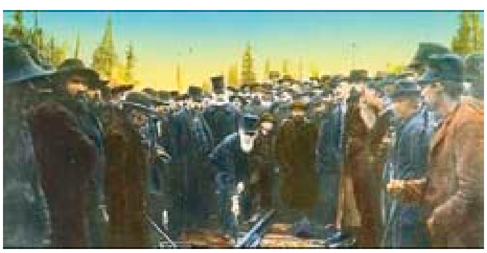
For some Lightfoot is a painter, using his guitar for a brush. He says as much in one song:

If you want to know my secret
Don't come runnin' after me
For I am just a painter
Passing through in history

The song *On Yonge Street*, chronicles the ambience of Toronto's main street.

He has something of the historian as well. In 1967 the CBC commissions him to write a major work marking the centennial of Canadian Confederation. In the 1860's British Columbia, then an independent colony, had agreed to join Canada on condition that it be linked to the new country by a railroad running from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Canada's first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, promised such a railroad for 1881. It would be delayed by a scandal that toppled his government (shades of our own day!), and it was only on November 7, 1885 that the Canadian Pacific Railway's last spike was driven, in Craigellachie, BC, before a large crowd (the event is immortalized in a famous picture).





Lightfoot, with his talent for storytelling, creates the poetic and touching *Canadian Railroad Trilogy*.

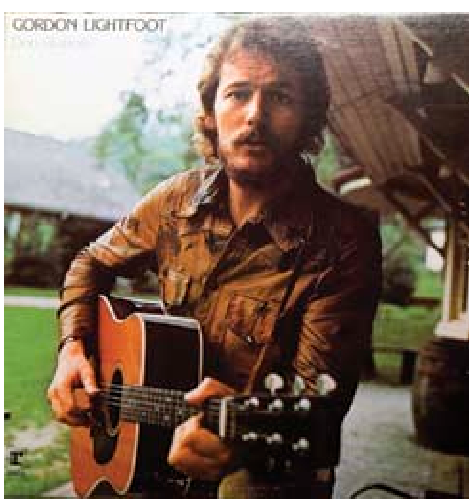
There was a time in this fair land
When the railroad did not run
When the wild majestic mountains
Stood alone against the sun
Long before the white man
And long before the wheel
When the green dark forest
Was too silent to be real

This epic work becomes a major hit, and is included on the album *The Way I Feel*. It will go through several versions, though the most interesting is certainly his own, with the orchestra of Ron Collier.

That same Centennial year brings with it a buzz of activities, and it is fertile in success for Canada's most popular writer-composer. He undertakes a cross-Canada tour as well as appearances in New York and Los Angeles.

In 1969 he leaves United Artists for Reprise, then the property of Frank Sinatra, and sets up his own production house, Early Morning Productions. With the help of friends and his sister Beverly, he publishes nearly all his songs himself.

In 1970 he brings out a new album, *Sit Down Young Stranger*, on which one song, *If You Could Read My Mind*, makes a splash. The album will later be re-released with that as the title song. And in 2002 the Festival of Charlottetown, on Prince Edward Island, will inaugurate a cabaret show titled *If You Could Read My Mind: the Music of Gordon Lightfoot.*



In 1976 another event spotlights Lightfoot's storytelling talent. In Canadian waters in Lake Superior, a lake that has been known to take itself for an ocean, a large cargo ship is broken in two by 7.5 metre waves and 125 km/h winds, going to the bottom with 29 men. In a few verses, Lightfoot chronicles *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*. It will reach second place on the US Billboard chart. For many, the tragedy of the ship *is* the song, a sort of musical documentary.



Over the next three decades, Lightfoot's calendar will be well filled. By 1980 he is giving some 50 concerts a year. In 1981 a concert tour takes him to Europe,

major American concert halls (Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center), across Canada, and to the various summer festivals. He is by now a virtuoso guitarist on both the six and twelve string guitar. His record collection grows to prodigious proportions, and many of these recordings score phenomenal successes.

A few favorites come to mind, songs that became hits and remain young. There's *Summertime Dream*, at once poetic and, yes, dreamy. There's *Sundown*, a 1974 song about infidelity, which hits top spot on US pop charts. There's *Did She Mention My Name* from 1968. And there's *Don Quixote*, for the hero who symbolizes a search for absolutes, for whom our troubadour has an admiration bordering on affection.

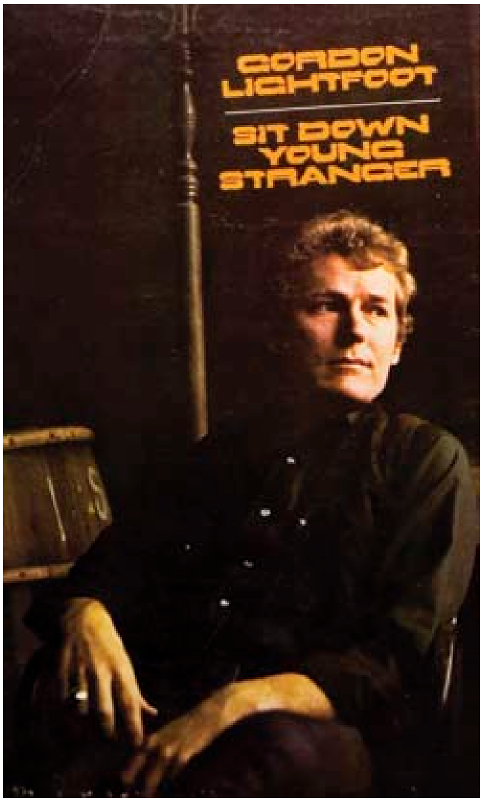
To add to his heavy calendar, Gordon Lightfoot is also a humanist, who answers *present* to solicitations for numerous social or environmental causes. An example: his famous song on the Detroit race riots of 1967.

It had begun before dawn on the 23rd of July, a confrontation between Blacks and whites that turned into a full-scale riot, ending only five days later, and leaving a heavy toll. There were numerous dead, many wounded, thousands arrested, and more than 2000 buildings burned down. The infamous uprising resulted in a Lightfoot song, which can be found on the album *Did She Mention My Name?*

Black day in July
And the soul of motor city
is bared across the land
As the book of law and order
is taken in the hands
Of the sons of the fathers
who were carried to this land
Black day in July
In the streets of motor city
is a deadly silent sound
And the body of a dead youth
lies stretched upon the ground
Upon the filthy pavement
No reason can be found

The song *Black Day in July* is released in April of 1968…not long after the assassination of Matin Luther King.

Black day in July
In the mansion of the governor
There's nothing that is known for sure
The telephone is ringing



And the pendulum is swinging
And they wonder how it happened
And they really know the reason
And it wasn't just the temperature
And it wasn't just the season

In Top 40 stations across the US there is a wind of panic, and the song is quickly boycotted, lest it stir up passions that are already overheated. As you can imagine, Lightfoot flies into a fury. "A lot of them don't want to upset their listeners," he says on the CBC. "It's the housewife in the morning, let's give her something that'll make her happy, why give her something that'll make her *think?*"



A romantic?

How do you categorize an artist like this? Is he country? Folk? Pop, pop-rock? *Why* pigeonhole him at all? Is he not beyond all styles?

What is certain is that he ceaselessly searches for the perfect song. He will take hours, days, months to perfect a song. He cares for his musicians, making their work easier by giving them scores as faultless as he can make them.

Let us not mince words, then, Gordon Lightfoot is a romantic. He harnesses his poetic prose to exorcise his hypersensitivity to suffering, that of others or his own, and his very vulnerability is a source of pain. It is, on the other hand, his sensitivity that allows him to respond to all solicitations, to react to joy and beauty in all its forms. Stories of love, barely disguised personal experiences, anecdotes…each text provides, inside a meaningful melody, a story or a mood.

The aura about him is due in large part, I believe, to his genius for sharing with his audiences his emotions, his propensity for dreaming, his love of love itself, his intimate connection with the elements of nature. Water, for example, plays a major role in his songs, as do the forest and the wind…a waterfall deep in the forest, the gurgling of the water…

Now if only you could see
The closin' of the day
If only you could be
Where the dawn breaks away
By the white cascade
Oh down in the glade
Where the long river flows
By my window

He dreams of leaving…the whistle of a passing train, the roar of a jet tearing the fabric of the sky. This song is one of his most famous:

In the early mornin' rain
With a dollar in my hand
And an achin' in my heart
And my pockets full of sand
I'm a long way from home
And I miss my loved one so
In the early mornin' rain
With no place to go
Out on runway number nine

Big 707 set to go
But I'm stuck here in the grass
Where the cold wind blows

A disaster, a homeless man looking for human warmth, a woman he runs across in his travels… we follow daily life through his eyes. Like many a troubadour who has trod the roads of here and everywhere, he has met the many faces of love, which can sometimes be oppressive.

That's what you get for lovin' me
Everything you had is gone,
As you can see
I ain't the kind to hang around
With any new love that I've found
'Cause movin' is my stock in trade
I'm movin' on
I won't think of you when I'm gone.

This song, about love and disappointment:

How long, said she,
can a moment like this
Belong to someone
What's wrong, what is right,
when to live or to die
We must almost be born
So if you should ask me
what secrets I hide
I'm only your lover,
don't make me decide

Or this one, about a man whose lover, at dawn, returns to her other life:

Softly she comes in the night,
Down the darkened hall
I hear her footsteps on my stair
And she is in my arms once more
Then softly she goes…in the dawn

Or this song of longing:

If I could only have you near
To breathe a sigh or two
I would be happy
just to hold the hands I love
Upon this winter night with you

In 1972 Lightfoot is diagnosed with Bell's Palsy: paralysis of his left arm and face, tingling in his leg, chest pains, dizziness. In short it's serious, and he has no option but to rest for a time. The following year he and his wife Brita, with whom he has two children, Fred and Ingrid, agree to divorce. The split will make headlines.

The time has come to gather his thoughts. The nomadic life that is in his nature is tough on a couple, and he will live single for nearly two decades. Then love knocks on his door once more. A pretty green-eyed blonde, Elizabeth Moon, becomes his second wife in 1989. His wanderings will always bring him back to her.

Like many other artists, he faced the twin demons of alcohol and gambling. An early song presaged later events:



Well I got my mail late last night
A letter from a girl
who found the time to write
To her lonesome boy
somewheres in the night
She sent me a railroad ticket too
To take me to her lovin' arms…
I went in town for one last round
And I gambled my ticket away
And the big steel rail won't carry me
Home to the one I love

And then there's this song, in which the bottle plays a leading role:

I'm on my second cup of coffee
And I still can't face the dawn.
The radio is playin' a soft country song
And if I don't stop this trembling hand
From reaching for the phone,
I'll be reaching for the bottle, Lord,
Before this day is done

In 1982 he emerges victorious from a long battle against his dependence. That unhappy experience could be the reason that, as far as I know, he has never allowed his music to be used in a commercial. "I don't want the beer commercial to be my epitaph," he supposedly once said.

Canadian Music's Long Trek

If we sometimes deplore that the Canadian sound is too rarely heard on our own airwaves, we might console ourselves by recalling that back in the 60's there was no real Canadian recording industry at all. English-Canadian songs were virtually absent from the AM stations that were then dominant, and recording companies did little to promote them. Artists who had recording ambitions had to go to the US.

The *Toronto Telegram* actually ran an article with the title *Canada Has a Booming Record Industry (but only because it's 95% American).* Said the article under the provocative headline, "We have so many good records available to us from the States that there's really not much point in doing a great deal of recording up here."

The knights of the Canadian labels finally reacted. Canadian musicians must have a place on the artistic scene without exiling themselves. Courageous and determined, laughing off the insults, the hurdles, the disappointments, the setbacks, these brave pioneers create the Canadian Talent Library. It was a non profit organization, which would create recordings by Canadian composers and musicians. However the CTL has no impact on the radio landscape. Station owners and programmers heap ridicule on the enterprise.

However there is a worrisome rumor on the horizon. A new regulatory body, the CRTC, might be thinking about imposing a quota of Canadian content on the reluctant broadcasters. Frightened by this unthinkable possibility, the more powerful station owners league together to inflate "cancon" and head off the menace. They fill their airtime with Joni Mitchell, Anne Murray, and of course Gordon Lightfoot.

The new chairman of the CRTC, Pierre Juneau, saw through the scheme. He told the owners that, since there is so much cancon on the airwaves already, they can't possibly object to a quota…of 30%.

Subsequently, many Canadians thought they recalled that Mitchell, Murray and Lightfoot had become popular *because* of the regulations. Not so. All three were famous not only in Canada but in the US and elsewhere before "cancon" rules were ever dreamed of.

The regulations did have their effect, however, and the choice of recordings played on Canadian radio stations changed dramatically…and forever.

What about the Lightfoot style? He has been called a crooner, and I leave it to you to judge. What I hear is a superb baritone voice, only moderately powerful but always impressive, and sometimes troubling. When he sings, he seems to sing for you alone.

The artist honored

Gordon Lightfoot came onto the record scene well before there were regulations forcing radio stations to play Canadian music (see *Canadian Music's Long Trek* above). It took them years to finally get around to promoting Canadian music, including Lightfoot's. I think I can venture to say that he helped *them* out too.

The smattering of songs I have quoted in this article give only a hint of his inexhaustible fountain of inspiration and his talent for turning inspiration into song. That talent explains his rise to the summits of artistic fame.

From 1965 through 1978, Lightfoot receives 17 Juno Awards: best folk singer, best singer, best composer, folk recording of the year. He enters the Juno Hall of Fame in 1986. He is nominated five times for Grammy Awards: for *Did She Mention My Name?*, *If You Could Read My Mind* and *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*. He is made a member of the Order of Canada in 1988, and a Companion of the Order of Canada 15 years later.

On October 2, 1997, at the opera house in his home town, and before his reconstituted family and his mother, the principal auditorium of the opera house is renamed the Gordon Lightfoot Auditorium.

Lightfoot loves to tour. In 2001 he sings at the House of Blues in Las Vegas, as well as the MGM Grand, the Desert Inn, and the Orleans.

All seems well when in September 2002, at a concert in Orillia, he is struck down by an abdominal hemorrhage and he is rushed to hospital. Following surgery he is in a coma that lasts several weeks. His loved ones, and indeed all Canadians, follow his medical bulletins.

Fortunately he survives and recovers, and he spends little time thinking about this brush with death. As soon as he leaves hospital in October 2003, he takes guitar in hand and begins vocal exercises. With a new album, *Harmony*, and an appearance on *Canadian Idol*, he goes back on the road.

With his usual wry humor, he titles it *The Better Late Than Never Tour.*

An unexpected gift

Before closing this glorious chapter in Canadian artistic life, let me emphasize that the Gordon Lightfoot of which I have spoken is in no way diminished or weakened by illness. He is a model for us all. Realizing how lucky he has been, he trains seriously and regularly. He is, thus, a mature man, full of health, perfectly recovered against all expectations, who has lost none of his charisma. Indeed — and I've saved this for the last — after a US tour that took him across the country he will, next Fall, begin a cross-Canada tour.

He will start in Vancouver in October. From there he will go to Montreal's Place des Arts, Toronto's Massey Hall (his favorite!), Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay and Ottawa.

He will, I predict, have a great time, for he has never concealed the fact he prefers to share his music in person with his fans rather than being locked away in a recording studio. "The pure pleasure of playing live never wears off, even after 40 years in the business," he says.

Software Reviews

by Reine Lessard and Gerard Rejskind



Beethoven: Hammerklavier Sonatas
Anton Kuerti
Analekta FL 2 3187

Lessard: *Hammerklavier* is the German term for pianoforte — it was originally called the "hammer keyboard." The expression dates from a time of growing German resistance to the increasing Italian hegemony in music. "Pianoforte" is of course an Italian term. Beethoven, with his usual impetuosity, was hardly the last to leap into the movement. And I have to say that the term "hammer keyboard" seems to suit perfectly the vigorous style of this work.

This precious album includes the *Sonata No. 28 in A Major, op.101*, followed by the powerful *Sonata No. 29 in B Flat, op.106*, each with four movements. I use the word "precious" advisedly, for that's what it is. Not only is the composer sublime (and what remains to be said about that?), but the pianist is entirely worthy of him.

During the nearly hour an a quarter these two works last, Kuerti, something of a Beethoven specialist, gives us a demonstration of his flawless technique, buttressed in this case by equally flawless sound. You have to hear him navigate with remarkable ease through *sforzando* passages and other segments that are lyrical and fraught with poetry and emotion. The performance serves to justify, if justification is needed, his reputation of unsurpassed playing which for many years has won over music lovers, and particularly Beethoven lovers. This is Kuerti the way I like him. I heartily recommend this CD.

The booklet, happily complete, makes it possibly unnecessary for me to add anything more on these sonatas by this greatest of composers of the early Romantic period.



Millennium Crossings
Lisa Weiss/ CurtCacioppo
Capstone CPS-8734

Lessard: The piano works on this recording are all by contemporary American composers, and indeed all but the first were composed since 1985. There are a number of fascinating elements here, both by the composers and by their virtuosity on the piano. And speaking of the piano itself, it is a Bösendorfer Imperial Concert Grand.

The Bösendorfer name is linked to Vienna, that musical centre of the 19th Century, and to Franz Liszt, whose energetic technique and dazzling playing always ended up wrecking the pianos he played. The massacre ended the day he got his hands on a Bösendorfer. Not only could it resist his excesses of enthusiasm, but he was won over by its incomparable tonal beauty, and he made it his own. From that day, the house of Bösendorfer, already famous, gained even more in celebrity.

The Imperial Concert Grand's keyboard includes one more octave than other pianos, situated at the bottom end, going down to CCCC, capable of producing a tone of 16 Hz! Even when those extra notes aren't played, they vibrate in sympathy with the other notes, giving the piano its unique sound.

Klavierstück, the first piece on the disc, from 1976, and the *Sonata trasfigurata* of 1986, are from Curt Cacioppo. This musician has had considerable contact with American Indians and is an activist for Native rights, and it happens that here and there he uses elements inspired by Native culture. Initially intrigued by the originality of his inspiration, I was charmed within a few measures by the music's architecture, by the juxtaposition of sounds, by the firm and energetic touch, and by the clarity of the playing. The pianist in this case is Lisa Weiss, herself a composer, who also plays Marino Baratello's 1991 *Klavierstück*.

Ingrid Arauco's *Triptych* is a collection of three short pieces, played this time by Curt Cacioppo: the *Freely, quasi improvisando*, followed by an *Intermezzo* of less than 50 seconds, and a final *Allegro with wit and verve*, which manages to be both tender and agitated.

Cacioppo also plays two magnificent pieces by Joseph Hudson, the *Fantasy-Refrain II* and a *Piece for the Swans*.

What I take away from this music and the musicians who play it is the conciseness, the clarity of the sound that often comes in clusters or in arpeggios, sometimes in trills, and the polished dynamic and timbral effects.

As for the sound, it is up to the standards of the most demanding audiophiles.

Felix Hell
Felix Hell
Reference Recordings RR-101CD

Rejskind: It's so *great* to have Reference Recordings back! Keith Johnson won't be setting up his microphones again until summer, but I had heard none of his last productions before Dorian "bought" the company (without actually

paying for it, a detail that subsequently took on a certain importance). The reason I hadn't heard them: Dorian had reinvented public relations, apparently using North Korea as a model, and when was the last time you received a CD from Pyongyang?

But with the back catalog in distribution once again we opened up some samples, and we were glad we did. These recordings are done with the usual Professor Johnson flair, and they are encoded in HDCD, the high definition process he helped develop.

Felix Hell is billed as an "organ sensation," and he is all of that. This young German-born prodigy moved to the US at the age of 14…to study at Juilliard! He was 17 when he recorded this collection in Lincoln, Nebraska. By then he had given some 250 concerts worldwide, which makes one wonder when he gets time for studies.



On the other hand, perhaps he knows all he needs to know for the moment, at least if I go by the music on this album, all from the 19th Century. It opens with Felix Alexandre Guilmant's *Sonata No. 1 in D Minor*, which bears the subtitle *Symphonie.* This is not truly an organ symphony, however, and much of it is more introspective than the powerhouse organ works that have long been used as hi-fi showpieces. Only in the third and final movement does Hell open up with the organ's considerable muscle. He is, however, very much at ease with the complex softer passages, a reflection of a maturity beyond his years.

Joseph Rheinberger, represented here by his *Abendfriede* ("evening peace") was also a child prodigy, who entered the Munich Royal Conservatory when he was 11. No fireworks here, as the name suggests. The finale of the *Symphony No. 1* of Louis Vierne, long the organist of Notre-Dame de Paris, has lots more fire, and I have heard it many times, though it has always left me cool.

It was when Felix Hell gets into Liszt that I really perked up. The *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H* is perhaps Liszt's most forward-looking music, all but leaving behind the tone-based compositions that had always dominated Western music. The title is a pun on the name of Johann Sebastian Bach (note that this *is* a prelude and fugue), but is also a reference to the German names of the notes B-flat, A, C and B. There is no key signature stated, because Liszt used as much as he could of the black and white notes of the keyboard. The overall tone and structure are closer to the 20th Century than to the 18th. A number of organists play it with great flamboyance because…well, this *is* Liszt, after all. It benefits from more respect for its structure, which is why I prefer it played by Fernando Germani than by E. Power Biggs, say (I've been lucky enough to hear both live). Hell is closer to Germani, and he never either reaches for an easy effect or gets lost in the complexity of the music.

The CD ends with a longer Liszt piece, the *Fantasy and Fugue on "Ad Nos ad Salutarem Undam*, inspired by Meyerbeer's opera *Le prophète.* This is rather austere music, as you might suppose from the fact that the opera was about John of Leyden, a 16th Century religious fanatic. However there are some dense variations on one of Meyerbeer's themes, which is what drew Liszt to this (now) almost forgotten opera in the first place.

Keith O. Johnson has placed his microphones some distance from the organ in order to capture not only the sound of the pipes but also of the reverberant interior or the First-Plymouth Congregational Church. Despite the distance the focus is excellent, and as the music progresses you get a good mental picture of the place. Recording levels are fairly low, with plenty of room for the *pleins jeux* passages.

The organ is a large one, and Felix Hell and the composers he plays take full advantage of the larger pipes. I found myself wondering what would be left of this music on a system without extreme bass response. On the Omega system it is awesome to listen to.

Argento: Casa Guidi
Von Stade & Minnesota Orch.
Reference Recordings RR-100CD
Lessard: The title of the album, which is also that of the first work on it, refers to the residence of celebrated poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, who exiled themselves to Florence fol-

lowing their secret marriage. Elizabeth's letters to her sister inspired composer Dominick Argento to write these five songs for the wonderful mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade: *Casa Guidi*, *the Italian Cook and the English Maid*, *Robert Browning*, *The Death of Mr. Barrett*, *and Domesticity.*



Fans of "Fricka" will find her again with joy. She has lost none of the immense talent that propelled her to the summit of her art, where she has shone since her beginnings, playing all of the roles most sought after in the opera world.

That is followed by a *Capriccio for Clarinet and Orchestra*, subtitled *Rossini in Paris*, brilliantly performed by virtuoso clarinetist Burt Hara. It is in point of fact a concerto, a title Argento has eschewed by respect for "the" clarinet concerto, the one by Mozart. The movements have the curious titles of *Une réjouissance*, *Une caresse à ma femme* and *Un petit train du plaisir.* Each refers to a composition by Rossini, but they are mere pretexts for development of a "Rossiniesque" ambience of comical verve, fantasy and humor, with a certain touch of romanticism.

The final work, commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra for its 75th season (in 1977), is titled *In Praise of Music: Seven Songs for Orchestra.* Each song is inspired by a character, either real or mythical, who awaken in universal fashion feelings inherent in human nature.: *David* for the healer, *Apollo* for the god, *Pan* for the Satyr, *Orpheus* for the sorrower, *Israel* for the angel, *Cecilia* for the saint, and *Mozart* for the child.

We should not be surprised by the extraordinary performance by Eiji Oue and the Minnesota, whoch have accustomed us to excellence.

The sonic quality of this HDCD recording, like those of the Reference Recording that follows, is beyond reproach. We can, I think, speak of the Johnson sound.

American Requiem
Danielpour & Pacific Symph. Orch.
RR-97CD RR-97CD

Lessard: The dedication reads, "to the memory of those who died in the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and in tribute to the American Soldier — past, present and future."

To mark the end of his posting as composer in residence with the orchestra in Orange County, California, Richard Danielpour received a commission for a major work for choir and large orchestra. The theme was to be peace, but also man's relationship with war.

Danielpour admits that, before embarking on this project, he had not the slightest experience of war, and so he booked meetings with veterans of three wars. Listening to them, writing down their experiences, thoughts and feelings long after the end of the conflicts in which they had fought, enabled him to get at least a hint of the incurable traces left by the tragedy of war. So impressed was he by the experience that the urgency grew in him to translate into music these deep experiences.

On the fateful morning of what would become known as 9/11, Danielpour was preparing to edit the proofs of the orchestral score of his *American Requiem*, but realized that it included neither preface nor dedication. He was on the phone to his publisher in New York, when she told him with horror that before her eyes a plane had just struck a tower of the World Trade Center. He knew instantly that he had his dedication.

One is generally eager to find antecedents in the works of a composer: *in this passage he is clearly influenced by Bach*, or *one can recognize the style of Mozart.* It is possible, indeed certain, that because of Danielpour's use of two languages — English and Latin — purists will think first of Brahms' *German Requiem* or Britten's *War Requiem.* One might equally be tempted to make comparisons with the *Requiem* of Verdi, recalling his use of a multitude of instruments and the importance given to the human voice. Too easy. It would be even more facile to talk of plagiarism.

For my part I believe that, notwithstanding any similarities, deliberate or otherwise, this religious opus is both magnificent and eloquent. I consider it a gift to have been asked to review it.

Danielpour has written this for a

large orchestra and a choir of 150 voices, as well as three hand-picked soloists, tenor Hugh Smith, mezzo soprano Stephanie Blythe, and baritone Mark Oswald. They are accompanied by the entire family of strings and woodwinds, brass and percussion of all sorts, including drums of different sizes, bells, carillons and cymbals. They produce an imposing mass of sound.

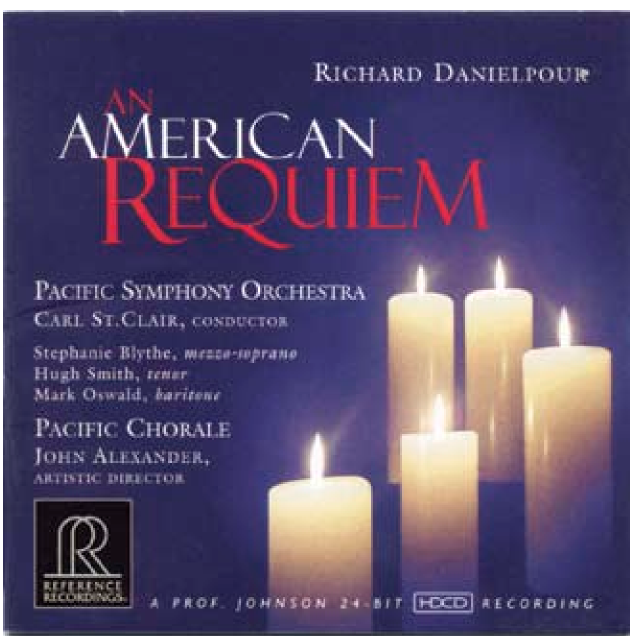
Despite such an abundance — I nearly wrote *overabundance* — of timbres, the composer never allows his music to become pompous, and there resides his genius. He pours it on, yet maintains a just balance. For me it is remarkable, at once intense and painful, gratifying to the ear, and poignant for the emotions it awakens. The composer's use of dynamics is part of its appeal, but so is his choice of the English texts, drawn from the works of celebrated American poets who have trained a bitter eye on war.

Three quotations from *Notes on the poetic text* which you'll find in the CD booklet: "*When you hear the poetic texts in* An American Requiem, *it is our belief that each word of the nine poems has risen from a great depth and carries the phosphor trail of other works.*"

And: "An American Requiem *opens with Walt Whitman, our democratic and roving eye, which sees a 'new-made double grave.*'" And further on: "*This strange, almost unbelievable, image conjured around 1863…floats up to us as a turbulent ghost image that might have been written the night of September 11th by a poet who lives in Battery Park City.*"

For too long the requiem has offered privileged access only to the erudite, able to understand dead languages. Thanks to Brahms, who dared to add the vernacular to the all-Latin Catholic liturgy, and to those who followed his daring innovation, a wider public can follow the text and comprehend it. Requiems have ceased to be opaque.

As for the music itself, it is of great beauty, with a use of dynamics calculated to touch our noblest, deepest sentiments.



The *Dies Irae* opens with the light use of percussion, which sets up the choppy rhythm which follows, with brass, drums and the *sforzando* choir. All the instruments are used to punctuate most effectively this magnificent aria.

The Latin verses touch the spiritual dimension of the relationship of humans to the Supreme Being: confusion, fear, resistance, anger, sadness, but hope as well. With few exceptions these verses are sung by the choir. The English texts are sung by the soloists, either individually or together, and address at once the understanding and the emotions.

Here is the tenor, in the *Dies Irae:*
Down a new made double grave.
Now nearer blow the bugles
and the drums strike more convulsive

And the daylight o'er the pavement
quite has faded,
And the strong [death-march]
enwraps me.
The moon gives you light
And the bugles and drums
give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers,
My heart gives you love.

That text is from renown poet Walt Whitman. Now listen to the baritone in the *Lacrimosa — Pie Jesu*, with another Whitman text:

Vigil strange I kept
on the field one night;
When you my son and my comrade
dropt at my side that day…
Long there and then in vigil I stood,
dimly around me
the battlefield spreading,
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there
in the fragrant silent night,
Passing sweet hours,
immortal and mystic hours
with you dearest comrade
Not a tear, not a word,
Vigil of silence, love and death,
Vigil for you my son and my soldier

Don't miss the *Sanctus*, with wildly ringing bells, rolling drums, strings, and the tenor singing the glory of the Almighty in alternation with the choir. The *Hosanna* is extraordinary, with voices, percussion and brass, a veritable song of praise, followed by the *Benedictus.*

The *Agnus Dei*, *Lay this Body Down*, sung by the mezzo soprano, is eminently touching. The text is by Michael Harper.

Can't you see
What love and heartache's done to me
I'm not the same as I used to be
This is my last affair

Two other illustrious poets are featured, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and an American poet identified in the text as H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). A touching anonymous Negro Spiritual is sung by the baritone.

The final *Lux Æterna* is sung at ppp volume by the choir. It is a gentle conclusion, peaceful, in which the fear of the Final Judgement is resolved in an act of faith and hope on the part of souls awaiting their Maker.

This, then, is a 21st Century *Requiem* that will put you through an entire range of emotions, and orient your reflection toward the passage from temporal to eternal life, at least as presented by the Christian church. First performed in November 2001, this Req*uiem* can be classed among the great ones: Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, brahms, Dvorak, and Fauré, and closer to our own day those of British composers Benjamin Britten, John Rutter…and Andrew Lloyd Webber, whose *Pie Jesu* haunts the first-time listener long after it ends.

At the summit of his art at the age of 50, Richard Danielpour is one of the cream of contemporary composers, and his celebrity did not begin with this work. He has penned other music that has been much played and recorded, and has known major success: operas, concertos, symphonies, ballets, chamber music, and other genres.

The CD booklet is generous with details on the composer as well as on the orchestra, the choir and their respective conductors, Carl St. Clair and John Alexander. If this music is new to you, that is more than useful.



Suite Española
Frühbeck de Burgos/New Philharmonia
FIM XR24 068

Rejskind: This recording is from late 1967, the golden age of Decca (known in North America as London for reasons of trade mark conflict). It had not yet been swallowed up by the Polygram/Philips empire, in which it would become merely a brand name. And it was busy making new recordings of the classical repertoire in the then distinctive *ffrr* (Full Frequency Range Recording) style. The stereo LP was a mere decade old, and not all the treasury of music had yet been redone.

At the same time Decca had not yet begun playing it safe, recording familiar warhorses that could be counted on to sell in large numbers. This recording is an unusual one, and one I suspect few companies would tackle today. A shame, because it is exceptional.

Isaac Albéniz is one of Spain's most recognized composers of the end of the 19th Century and the early 20th. If his music reflected far more influences than those of his native Catalonia, it can be explained in large part by the fact that he ran away from home at the age of 13 and toured Costa Rica, the United States, England, Germany, Belgium and Hungary. Of course by the time he got to Belgium he was no longer a runaway teenager, and in fact he was able to get a bursary from no less a personality than the King of Spain to study at the Brussels Conservatory. He later studied with Vincent d'Indy, Paul Dukas, and…oh yes, Franz Liszt. You would expect his music to be thoroughly cosmopolitan.

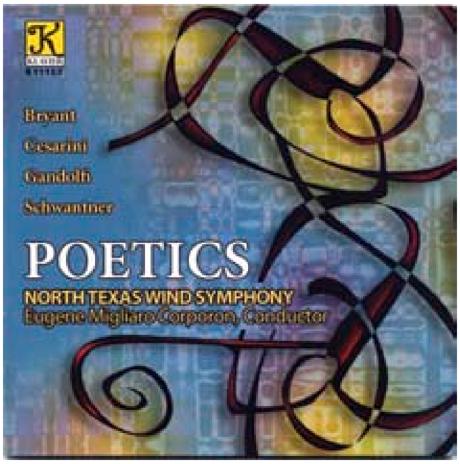
On the other hand, he was able to hear the folk music idiom of his native land through fresh ears. Indeed "native land" in this case doesn't mean what one might assume. To other Europeans "Spanish music" meant the music of Andalusia. If a number of French composers borrowed from it (Bizet is an example, as are Chabrier and Ravel), it was because the Andalusians were much influenced by the French, and so they found its forms familiar.

Albéniz is best known for piano music, drawing on the folk themes of different parts of Spain, but with a pan-European flavor. It has often been orchestrated, and this suite, by Spanish conductor Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, evokes the different regions of Spain. For anyone who thinks Spanish music is just flamenco or the dances found in *Carmen*, the *Española* suite is an ear opener. Seven of the sections (I'll get to the eighth shortly) are named for regions of Spain, with appropriate melodies or rhythms. For Castille there is a *Seguidillas*, for Austurias a *Leyenda*, for Aragon a *Fantasia*, for Cadiz a *Cancion*, for Seville a *Sevillanas*, for Granada a *Serenata*, and for Cataluna a *Corranda*. The *Cancion* and *Corranda* will probably sound less Spanish to those who know the country through travel documentaries, but for that reason they may be the most instructive.

Oh yes, the eighth section of the suite.

There, Albéniz did not draw on Spanish music at all. It is titled *Cuba*. I suppose that it was, in 1967, politically dangerous even for a Spanish conductor working in Britain, at least if he had any intention of ever touring in the United States, The pretext for dropping *Cuba* was that, alone among the movements of the suite, it was inspired by music from outside Spain. Instead of simply dropping it, which would have made for a very short LP, Frühbeck de Burgos substituted a piece called *Cordoba*, extracted from the *Cantos de España, op. 232*. It is an odd choice, because it seems totally out of temper with the rest of the suite, at least as much as the original *Cuba* (which I have not heard) would surely have been.

The orchestration is entirely successful. The original jacket notes (shrunk down from LP size to textured paper in the CD) outline the changes Frühbeck de Burgos made to the original piano score to make it seem appropriate for orchestra. This FIM re-release, made by JVC in the xrcd process, sounds very good, with a natural spread of sound that was characteristic of Decca's ffrr recordings.



Poetics
Corporon/North Texas Wind Symph.
Klavier K11153
Rejskind: This is one of a long-running series of wind recordings on Klavier by this first-rate orchestra. I think the title may have been chosen at random, but what it contains is worthy of anyone's attention for both musical and sonic reasons.

The first reason to get it, I think, is Joseph Schwanter's *Percussion Concerto.* Now the percussionist in a symphony orchestra is not the one groupies mob at the stage door. Garrison Kiellor once said that the triangle is an instrument for a saint (he said the same thing about the harp, for a different reason). The percussionist is important, but only once in a while. Perhaps that's why, in 1995, Schwanter was commissioned to write an extended solo piece for the principal percussionist of the New York Philharmonic, Christopher Lamb. And what a piece it is!

Schwanter says he has long been fascinated by the timbral aspects of music and been attracted to the richly varied sonic resources of percussion. What he composed is nothing less than a masterpiece, drawing on an astonishingly diverse panoply of instruments. They are here played by Christopher Deane, backed up by the band's regular percussionists to say nothing of the rest of the orchestra.

Listen for yourself. He marshals three tom-toms, timbaletas, bongos, a marimba (the only amplified instrument in the work), a xylophone which is sometimes struck and sometimes bowed, and a varied set of drums of all shapes and sizes, including a bass drum you'll feel as much as hear. But Schwanter has done more than make noise, for that would be all too easy. He juxtaposes dense and sophisticated melodies for brass and woodwinds with contrapuntal percussion effects. The result, across three movements that occupy more than a half hour, is impressive, sometimes disturbing, often viscerally beautiful.

The playing is wonderful too, and that goes both for Deane and the large ensemble, conducted masterfully by Eugene Migliaro Corporon. The engineering, by Bruce Leek, is as good as it gets.

But wait a minute, there's more!

Steven Bryant's *Stampede* has a sort of rodeo atmosphere to it, reminiscent of the music of Aaron Copland. Michael Gandolfi's *Vientos y Tangos* ("wind and tangos") is not always rhythmic, but much of it is. Gandolfi has used famed concert tango composer Astor Piazzola as a model, and I liked the piece very much.

I'm less enthusiastic about Franco Cesarini's *Poema Alpestre*, whose length exceeds its breadth, but even without him this recording is chock full of goodness. The first time you'll play it for the sound, but I predict you'll come back for the music.



Film Spectacular II
Black & London Festival Orch.
FIM XR24 070
Rejskind: My first impression, if you'll pardon the pun, is that nobody does music like this anymore. They sure *used* to. Films had lush ballads as scores, and there were countless orchestras that would bring out collections of these hummable tunes. Percy Faith was one, Billy Vaughn was another, and Stanley Black was yet another.

This one, from 1963, is special for being part of London/Decca's "Phase 4" series. Of course Phase 4 did not feature four channels, and the reason for the name is a mystery. Decca (the British company, not the American one of the same name) was known for its realistic ffrr recordings, intended to sound the way an orchestra might from the eighth row of a good hall. Phase 4 was Decca's attempt to live down that reputation.

The technique was totally opposite: use a *lot* of microphones, each one very close to an instrument, and dial in lots of stereo separation. Crank up the volume on the pressing, to overcome rumble, hum, whatever. The results were spectacular, though not perhaps truly hi-fi.

It had been many years since I had listened to a Phase 4 recording, and of course I had not had the advantage of listening with gear like the Omega reference system. Notwithstanding the very close-in sound, these recordings really *did* sound good. The dynamics are overwhelming, probably difficult to get onto modern digital (First Impressions Music has used xrcd to do the job). And Stanley Black, here conducting the Royal Festival Orchestra, was a really talented bandleader.

This CD is a reminder that writers of film music back then were not too shabby, and it did my heart good to hear them again. Here's *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Gone With the Wind*, *The Magnificent Seven*, a suite from *My Fair Lady*, and even the haunting score from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. I hasn't heard any of them in a while.

I also couldn't help noticing that, despite my impressions of the old LPs, they are not truly recorded in ping pong stereo. When there is a clash of percussion or brass, you can *hear* it travel all the way to the other wall and back again. The original engineer, Arthur Lilley, knew what he was doing.

No, nobody does music like this anymore, but a modern engineer, or musician for that matter, could learn a lot by listening to this CD.

Goodbye Korbon

Is hi-fi — or consumer electronics in general — getting tougher to survive in? Change has claimed another victim, a major Canadian distributor.

The company is Korbon trading, which was already five years old when *UHF* was created in 1982. Ken Simpson had worked at the company importing Sharp when he set up his own company, which he named after his daughters, Kory and Bonnie. The company had an ad in our very first issue, for Canton speakers. Not many of the advertisers in that same issue are still around.

In recent years Korbon was Canadian distributor for a number of high end brands, including Conrad-Johnson, Quad, Wharfedale, and Rockford Fosgate.

Most of Korbon's stronger competitors are also US distributors, and that may be the key to their strength. However the Korbon announcement refers to a number of corporate and *personal* challenges. That could mean that…well, Ken Simpson has been at this for a long time.

Not that he is leaving electronics entirely. Korbon says that warranty work on Korbon products will be carried out by a firm called KSSM. That stands for "Ken Simpson Sales and Marketing."

The UHF Reference Systems

All equipment reviews are done on at least one of UHF's reference systems, selected as working tools. They are changed infrequently, and only after long consideration.

The Alpha system

Our original reference is in a room with extraordinary acoustics, designed as a recording studio. It allows us to hear what we couldn't hear elsewhere, but there's a down side. Not only is the room too small for large speakers, but it is also at the top of a particularly unaccommodating stairwell.

Main digital player: Linn Unidisk 1.1
Additional CD player: CEC TL-51X belt-driven transport, Counterpoint DA-10A converter with HDCD card.
Digital cable: Atlas Opus 1.5m
Digital portable: Apple iPod 60 Gb
Turntable: Audiomeca J-1
Tone arm: Audiomeca SL-5
Pickup: Goldring Excel
Phono preamp: Audiomat Phono-1.5
Preamplifier: Copland CTA-305
Power amplifier: Simaudio Moon W-5LE)
Loudspeakers: Living Voice Avatar OBX-R
Interconnects: Pierre Gabriel ML-1, Atlas Voyager All-Cu
Loudspeaker cables: Actinote LB/ Eclipse III
Power cords: Gutwire, Wireworld
AC filters: Foundation Research LC-2 (power amp), Inouye SPLC.

The Omega system

It serves for reviews of gear that cannot easily fit into the Alpha system, with its small room. We didn't set out to make an "A" (best system) and a "B" (economy) system, and we didn't want to imply that one of the two systems is somehow better than the other. Hence the names, which don't invite comparisons. Unless you're Greek of course.

Digital players: shared with the Alpha system
Turntable: Linn LP12/Lingo II
Tone arm: Alphason HR-100S MCS
Pickup: Goldring Excel
Phono preamp: Audiomat Phono-1.5
Preamplifier: Copland CTA-305
Power amplifier: Simaudio Moon W-8
Loudspeakers: Reference 3a Suprema II
Interconnects: Pierre Gabriel ML-1, Atlas Navigator All-Cu
Loudspeaker cables: Pierre Gabriel ML-1 for most of the range, Wireworld Polaris for the twin subwoofers.
Power cords: GutWire, Aurora
AC filters: GutWire MaxCon Squared, Foundation Research LC-1
Acoustics: Gershman Acoustic Art

The Kappa system

This is our home theatre system. As with the original Alpha system, we had limited space, and that pretty much ruled out huge projectors and two-metre screens. We did, however, finally come up with a system whose performance gladdens both eye and ear, with the needed resolution for reviews.

HDTV monitor: Hitachi 43UWX10B CRT-based rear projector
DVD player: Simaudio Moon Stellar with Faroudja Stingray video processor
Preamplifier/processor: Simaudio Moon Attraction, 5.1 channel version
Power amplifiers: Simaudio Moon W-3 (main speakers), Celeste 4070se (centre speaker), Robertson 4010 (rear)
Main speakers: Energy Reference Connoisseur
Centre speaker: Thiel MCS1, on *UHF's* own TV-top platform
Rear speakers: Elipson 1400
Subwoofer: 3a Design Acoustics
Cables: Van den Hul, MIT, GutWire, Wireworld
Line filter: GutWire MaxCon Squared

All three systems have dedicated power lines, with Hubbell hospital grade outlets. Extensions and power bars are equipped with hospital-grade connectors.

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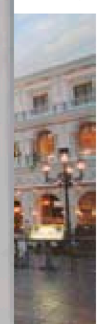
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DRM in Canada

"DRM" of course stands for "Digital Rights Management," technology to limit what consumers can do with music, movies and other material they've bought. In the United States DRM is backed by tough laws. In Canada and Europe, on the other hand, copying for private use is legal. So far.

CRIA (the Canadian Recording Industry Association), the Canadian counterpart to RIAA, the US lobbyist for Big Media, would like to see a US-style DRM law, and is even offering to (ahem!) help write it. A tough DRM law was in fact introduced last year, but there was an election and a change of government, and the Conservatives are not as hot on the issue as the Liberals were.

But now the plot thickens.

Some of Canada's major recording artists are denouncing CRIA, because they say its policies are intended to favor major recording labels, not the creators of music. There are some A-list names on the list, such as Avril Lavigne, Sarah McLachlan and The Barenaked Ladies. Says the CMCC, "We are the people who actually create Canadian music. Without us, there would be no musi-

... patterned its name after the Canadian Value of Music Coalition. *That* was a CRIA program to convince music downloaders that they were hurting the very musicians they love. The CMCC reply: "Suing our fans is destructive and hypocritical, digital locks are risky and counterproductive, and cultural policy should support actual Canadian artists."

Did we mention that CRIA supports *big* record labels? Many Canadian artists are signed to smaller labels, such as

... we can remain members given CRIA's decision to advocate solely on behalf of the four major foreign multi-national labels."

There is another record company group in Canada, the Canadian Independent Record Production Association (CIRPA). And that association has picked up six more labels.

As for the Member of Parliament who had piloted the failed DRM bill through the last parliament, he was personally defeated in the January election.

Errata

That's the plural of *erratum*, as you probably know even if you flunked Latin, and it means "mistakes."

You'd think errors in a magazine would hide somewhere in the fine print, where it is hard to see. In fact some of them pass unseen because they are too *big*. There was a major typo on the cover of *UHF* No. 59. And you know the worst part? we actually paid our prepress house a bonus to do a last moment correction on a last-moment mistake, and then we didn't see the even bigger one! Not until it was too late at least.

But back to issue No. 75.

Did you see the review of the CEC 5400 integrated amplifier? Only there *is* no 5400 amplifier. It was the CEC 5300, as we would have known if we had looked more closely at the front panel.



We hear the distributor got anxious calls from dealers who wanted to know when they would be getting the first shipments of the "5400" amps. But at least we were consistent. We called it ...

Cleaning up your CD player

The Milty cleaning disc (shown on the previous page) has a series of fine brushes to clean the lens of your CD or DVD player, without danger of damage. We use ours once a month. See the insert for The Audiophile Store, which begins on page 55.

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State of the Art

by Gerard Rejskind



Is music important to all humans? I would say so, and it explains why the first humans began to make music even before they discovered fire, or weapons with which to kill other humans. We know, because we've found remains of their instruments.

We also know that music is not listened to the same way by everyone. For a substantial portion of the world population, music has a deep importance, and is listened to with a certain intensity and concentration. That would be the case of audiophiles, of course. For others, it is the superficial aspects of music that are important. I suppose that may explain the success of "Rhythm" FM stations…stations, as one wag has it, "for people who can't listen to music without moving their hips."

But earlier this year I came across a clue to the mystery: why doesn't everyone get involved with music the same way, and (by extension) why not all music reproduction systems are "involving."

When I'm on an airplane I don't buy the headphones and listen to the airline's canned music channels. But when I was on my way to Vegas in January, I brought along the magazine's iPod, chock full of albums encoded in lossless compression. I also brought along a pair of headphones with noise cancellation: a little microphone picks up ambient rumble and reproduces it in reverse phase to cancel it out at the ear. On the first aircraft, a Boeing 737, that worked well. But after changing planes at Detroit I found myself near the tail of a 767, and the headphones could no longer do more than make a minor dent in the noise level. The result was a disturbing discovery. Everyone was singing out of tune!

No, not really out of tune, but I could no longer tell whether they *were* in tune. I tried some recordings by singers whose pitch I knew to be particularly accurate: soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian doing the songs of Pauline Viardot (on Analekta), or Margie Gibson singing Irving Berlin (on Sheffield). For all I could tell they might be way off the right note. What was going on here? Is this what it's like to have a tin ear?

Now I need to be careful here, because "tin ear" is one of those epithets you don't toss off at anyone bigger than you. It's a value judgement and it will be taken as such. I have a good ear for pitch, and as an audiophile you almost certainly do too. With the subterranean rumbling of the 767, however, I was no longer sure of the pitch I was hearing, and that made music *way* less interesting.

I wound up looking for other music and finally settled on the latest Coldplay album, on which the dominant element is — you guessed it — rhythm. And even that wasn't so hot.

This curious experience got me thinking about a question that audiophiles like to talk about: the ability of a music system to deliver accurate pitch. As nearly as I can recall, Linn was the first company to talk about this, advising listeners to try to repeat a melody in their heads. The easier that was, the better the system.

Now that piece of advice made critics of the high end movement snicker, especially in the years since digital became the common home music source. Now that wow and flutter and other speed variations are a thing of the past, how can the pitch of the music be wrong?

It can't actually be wrong, but it can certainly be *ambiguous.* That was what I experienced on the plane, and also what I experience when I listen to a system that doesn't seem interesting. Maybe the music is on pitch and maybe it's not, but you have to make an effort to tell one way or the other.

And *that* realization brought me back to a phenomenon I came across many years ago: Shepard's tones.

First demonstrated in 1964 (though possibly it had precursors) by R. N. Shepard, the tones are a series of notes going up the scale, seemingly forever. How is it done? Shepard used a computer to manipulate the harmonic content of the notes in an interesting way, so as to make the exact pitch ambiguous. The result is that you always know what note you are hearing, but you lose track of what octave it belongs in. You can hear them at www.uhfmag.com/Tech/Shepard.html.

Once the plane had landed I was relieved to find that my sense of pitch had recovered just fine, and the music packed into my iPod was enjoyable once again.

The fundamental building blocks of music, which give music both its meaning and its emotional impact, are melody, harmony and rhythm. Muck them up, or even make them ambiguous, and you've just got less music. Either you need to make an excessive effort to get involved in what you're hearing, or you can't make it out at all.

This wasn't new to me, to be sure. I've long used the word "musicality" to refer to a system's ability to communicate music's powerful message. You have too, possibly. What the experience on the plane gave me was a clue as to why some systems with great specs can't do it. It's not that they get the music wrong, it's that you can't be sure if they get it right or wrong.